

THE ARGOSY.

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THE STORY OF CHARLES STRANGE.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

WITH MR. JONES.

"MY DEAR CHARLES,—I particularly wish you to come to me. I want some legal advice, and I would rather you acted for me than anyone else. Come up this morning, please.

"Your affectionate sister,

"BLANCHE."

The above note, brought from Gloucester Place on Monday morning by one of Lady Level's servants, reached me before ten o'clock. By the dashing character of the handwriting, I judged that Blanche had not been in the calmest temper when she penned it.

"Is Lord Level at home?" I inquired of the man, Sanders.

"No, sir. His lordship went down to Marshdale yesterday evening. A telegram came for him, and I think it was in consequence of that he went."

I wrote a few words to Blanche, telling her I would be with her as soon as I could, and sent it by Sanders.

But a lawyer's time is not always his own. One client after another kept coming in that morning, as if on purpose; and it was half-past twelve in the day when I reached Gloucester Place.

The house in Gloucester Place was, and had been for some little time now, entirely rented by Lord Level of Major Carlen. The Major, when in London, had rooms in Seymour Street, but lived chiefly at his club.

"Her ladyship has gone out, sir," was Sanders's greeting to me, when he answered my ring at the door-bell.

"Gone out?"

"Just gone," confirmed Major Carlen, who was there, it seemed, and came forward in the wake of Sanders. "Come in, Charles."

He turned into the dining-room, and I after him. "Blanche

ought to have waited in," I remarked. "I have come up at the greatest inconvenience."

"She has gone off in a tantrum," cried the Major, lowering his voice as he carefully closed the door and pushed a chair towards me, just as if the house were still in his occupancy.

"But where has she gone?" I asked, not taking the chair, but standing with my elbow on the mantelpiece.

"Who's to know? To you, in Essex Street, I shouldn't wonder. She was on the heights of impatience at your not coming."

"Not to Essex Street, I think, Major. I should have seen her."

"Nonsense! There's fifty turnings and windings between this and Essex Street, where you might miss one another; your cab taking the straight way and she the crooked," retorted the Major. "When Blanche gets her back up, you can't easily put it down."

"Something has gone contrary, I expect."

"Nothing has gone contrary but herself," said the Major in reply, who seemed in a cross and contrary mood on his own part. "Women are the very deuce for folly."

"Well, what is it all about, sir? I suppose you can tell me?"

The Major sat down in Lord Level's easy chair, pushed back his cloak, and prepared to explain.

"What it's all about is just nothing, Charles; but so far as Madam Blanche's version goes, it is this," said he. "They were about to sit down, yesterday evening, to dinner—which they take on Sundays at five o'clock (good, pious souls!) and limit their fare to roast beef and a tart—when a telegram arrived from Marshdale. My lord seemed put out about it; my lady was no doubt the same. 'I must go down at once, Blanche,' said he, speaking on the spur of the moment. 'But, why? Where's the need of it?' returned she. 'Surely there can be nothing at Marshdale to call you away on Sunday and in this haste?' 'Yes,' said he, 'there is; there's illness.' And then, Blanche says, he tried to cough down the words, as if he had made a slip of the tongue. 'Who is ill?' said Blanche. 'Let me see the telegram.' Level slid the telegram into his pocket, and told her it was Mr. Edwards, the old steward. Down he sat again at the table, swallowed a mouthful of beef, sent Sanders to put up a few things in his small portmanteau, and was off in a cab like the wind. Fact is," added the Major, "had he failed to catch that particular train, he would not have got down at all, being Sunday; and Sanders says that catching it must have been a near shave for his lordship."

"Is that all?"

"No. This morning there was delivered here a letter for his lordship; post-mark Marshdale, handwriting a certain Italian one that Blanche has seen before. She has seen the writer, too, it seems; a fair lady called Nina. Blanche argues that as the letter came from Marshdale, the lady must be at Marshdale, and she means to know

without delay, she says, who and what this damsel is, and what the tie may be that binds her to Lord Level and gives her the right to pursue him, as she does, and the power to influence his movements, and to be at her beck and call. The probability is," added the shrewd Major, "that this person wrote to him on the Saturday, but, being a foreigner, was not aware that he would not receive her letter on Sunday morning. Finding that he did not arrive at Marshdale on the Sunday, and, the day getting on, she despatched the telegram. That's how I make it out, Charles; I don't know if I am right."

"You think, then, that some Italian lady is at Marshdale?"

"Sure of it," returned the Major. "I've heard of it before to-day. Expect she lives there, making journeys to her own land between whiles, no doubt. The best and the worst of us get home-sick."

"You mean that she lives there in — in — well, in a manner not quite orthodox; and that Lord Level connives at it?"

"Connives at it!" echoed the old reprobate. "Why, he is at the top and bottom of it. Level's a man of the world, always was, and does as the world does. And that little ignorant fool, Blanche, ferrets out some inkling of this, and goes and sets up a fuss! Level's as good a husband to her as can be, and yet she's not content! Commend me to foolish women! They are all alike!"

In his indignation against women in general, Major Carlen rose from his chair and began striding up and down the room. I was pondering on what he had said to me.

"What right have wives to rake up particulars of their husband's private affairs?" he demanded fiercely. "If Level does go off to Marshdale for few days' sojourn now and again, is it any business of Blanche's what he goes for, or what he does there, or who he sees? Suppose he chose to maintain a whole menagerie of — of — Italian monkeys there, ought Blanche to interfere and make bones over it?"

"But —"

"He does not offend her; he does not allow her to see that anything exists to offend her: why, then, should she suspect this and suspect that, and peep and peer after Level as if she were a detective told off expressly to watch his movements?" continued the angry man. "Only an ignorant girl would dream of doing it. I am sick of her folly."

"Well now, Major Carlen, will you listen to me for a moment," I said, speaking quietly and calmly as an antidote to his heat. "I don't believe this. I think you and Blanche are both mistaken."

He brought himself to an anchor on the hearthrug, and stared at me under his thick, grizzled eyebrows. "What is it that you don't believe, Charles?"

"This that you insinuate about Marshdale. I have faith in Lord Level; I like Lord Level; and I think you are misjudging him."

"Oh, indeed!" responded the Major. "I suppose you know what a wild blade Level always was?"

"In his early days he may have been. But you may depend upon it that when he married he left his wild ways behind him."

"All right, young Charles. And, upon my word, you are pretty near as young in the world's depths as Blanche herself is," was the Major's sarcastic remark. "Do you wish to tell me there's nothing up at Marshdale, with all these mysterious telegrams to Level, and his scampers back in answer? Come!"

"I admit that there seems to be some mystery at Marshdale. Something that we do not understand, and that Lord Level does not intend us to understand: but I must have further proof before I can believe it is of any such nature as you hint at, Major. For a long time past, Lord Level has appeared to me like a man in trouble; as if he had some anxiety on his mind."

"Well," acquiesced the Major equably, "and what can trouble a man's mind more than the exactions of these foreign syrens? Let them be Italian, or Spanish, or French — what you will — they'll worry your life out of you in the long run. What does that Italian girl do at Marshdale?"

"I cannot say. For my own part I do not know that one is there. But if she be, if there be a whole menagerie of Italian ladies there, as you have just expressed it, Major ——"

"I said a menagerie of monkeys," he growled.

"Monkeys, then. But whether they be monkeys or whether they be ladies, I feel convinced that Lord Level is acting no unworthy part—that he is loyal to his wife."

"You had better tell her so," nodded the Major; "perhaps she'll believe you. I told her the opposite. I told her that when women marry gay and attractive men, they must look out for squalls, and learn to shut their eyes a bit in going through life. I bade her bottle up her fancies, and let Marshdale and her husband alone, and not show herself a simpleton before the public."

"What did she say to that?"

"Say? It was that piece of advice which raised the storm. She burst out of the room like a maniac, declaring she wouldn't remain in it to listen to me. The next thing was, I heard the street door bang, and saw my lady go out, putting on her gloves as she went. You came up two minutes afterwards."

I was buried in my thoughts again. He stood staring at me, as if I had no business to have thoughts.

"Look here, Major: one thing strikes me forcibly: the very fact of Lord Level allowing these telegrams to come to him openly is enough to prove that matters are not as you and Blanche suspect. If ——"

"How can a telegram come secretly?" interrupted the Major.

"He would take care that they did not come at all—to his house."

"Oh, would he?" cried the old reprobate. "I should like to know how he could hinder it if any she-fiend chooses to send them."

"Rely upon it he would hinder it. Level is not one to be coerced against his will by either man or woman. Have you any idea how long Blanche will remain out?"

"Just as much as you have, Charley. She may remain away till night, for all I know."

It was of no use, then, my staying longer; and time, that day, was almost as precious to me as gold. Major Carlen threw on his cloak, and we went out together.

"I should not wonder if my young lady has gone to Seymour Street," remarked the Major. "The thought has just occurred to me."

"To your lodgings, you mean?" I asked, thinking it very unlikely.

"Yes; Mrs. Guy is there. The poor old thing arrived from Jersey on Saturday. She has come over on her usual errand—to consult the doctors; grows more ridiculously fanciful as she grows older. You might just look in upon her now, Charles; it's close by: and then you'll see whether Blanche is there or not."

I spared a few minutes for it. Poor Mrs. Guy looked very poorly indeed; but she was meek and mild as ever, and burst into tears as I greeted her. Her ailments I promised to go and hear all about another time. Yes, Blanche was there. When we went in, she was laughing at something Mrs. Guy had said, and her indignation seemed to have subsided.

I could not stay long. Blanche came out with me, thinking I should go back with her to Gloucester Place. But that was impossible; I had already wasted more time than I could well spare. Blanche was vexed.

"My dear, you should not have gone out when you were expecting me. You know how very much I am occupied."

"Papa vexed me, and drove me to it," she answered. "He said—oh, such wicked things, that I could not and would not stay to listen. And all the while I knew it was not that he believed them, but that he wanted to make excuses for Lord Level."

I did not contradict her. Let her retain, an' she could, some little veneration for her step-father.

"Charles, I want to have a long conversation with you, so you must come to me as soon as you can," she said. "I mean to have a separation from my husband; perhaps a divorce, and I want you to tell me how I must proceed in it. I did think of applying to Jennings and Ward, Lord Level's solicitors, but perhaps you will be best."

I laughed. "You don't suppose, do you, Blanche, that Lord Level's solicitors would act for you against him?"

"Now, Charles, you are speaking lightly; you are making game of me. Why do you laugh? I can tell you it is more serious than you may think for; and I am serious. I have talked of this for a long time, and now I *will* act. How shall I begin?"

"Do not begin at all, Blanche," I said, with earnestness. "*Do*

nothing. Were your father living—were your mother living, they would both give you this advice—and this is not the first time I have enjoined it on you. Ah, my dear, you do not know—you little guess what misery to the wife such a climax as this which you propose would involve."

Blanche had turned to the railings round the interior of Portman Square, and halted there, apparently looking at the shrubs. Her eyes were full of tears.

"On the other hand, Charles, you do not know, you cannot guess, what I have to bear; what a misery it makes of my life."

"Are you *sure* of the facts that make the misery?"

"Why, of course I am."

"I think not, Blanche. I think you are mistaken."

She turned to me in surprise. "But I *can't* be mistaken," she said. "How can I be? If Lord Level does not go to Marshdale to—to—to see people, what does he go for?"

"He may go for something quite different. My dear, I have more confidence in your husband than you have, and I think you are wrong. I must be off; I've not another moment; but these are my last words to you, Blanche.—Take no action. Be still. *Do nothing.*"

By half-past four o'clock, the most pressing of my work was over for the day, and then I took a cab to Lincoln's Inn to see Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar. He had often said to me, good old uncle that he was: "Come to me always, Charles, when you are in any legal doubt or difficulty, or deem that my opinion may be of use to you." I was in one of those difficulties now. Some remarkably troublesome business had been laid before me by a client; I could not see my way in it at all, and was taking it to Sergeant Stillingfar.

The old chambers were just as they used to be; as they were on the day which the reader has heard of, when I saw them for the first time. Running up the stairs, there sat a clerk at the desk in the narrow room, where young Lake, full of impudence, had sat that day, Mr. Jones's empty place beside it now, as it was then.

"Is the Sergeant in?" I asked the clerk.

"No, sir; he's not out of Court yet. Mr. Jones is in."

I went on to the inner room. Old Jones, the Sergeant's own especial clerk, was writing at his little desk in the corner. Nothing was changed; not even old Jones himself. He was not, to appearance, a day older, and not an ounce bigger. Lake used to tell him he would make his fortune if he went about the country in a caravan and called himself a consumptive lamp-post.

"My uncle is not back from Court, Graham says," I observed to the clerk, after shaking hands.

"Not yet," he answered. "I don't think he'll be long. Sit down, Mr. Strange."

I took the chair I had taken that first day years ago, and waited.

Mr. Jones finished the writing he was about, arranged his papers, and then came and stood with his back to the fire, having kept his quill in his hand. It must be a very hot day indeed which did not see a fire in that grate.

"If the Sergeant is not back speedily, I think I must open my business to you, and get your opinion, Mr. Jones," I said. "I dare say you could give me one as well as he."

"Some complicated case that you can't quite manage?" he rejoined.

"It's the most complicated, exasperating case I ever had brought to me," I answered. "I think it is a matter more for a detective officer to deal with than a solicitor. If Sergeant Stillingfar says the same, I shall throw it up."

"Curious things, some of those detective cases," remarked Mr. Jones, gently waving his pen.

"They are. I wouldn't have to deal with them, *as a detective*, for the world. Shall I relate this case to you?"

He took out his watch and looked at it. "Better wait a bit longer, Mr. Charles. I expect the Sergeant every minute now."

"Don't you wonder that my uncle continues to work?" I cried presently. "He is old now. I should retire."

"He is sixty-five. If you were not young yourself, you would not call that old."

"Old enough, I should say, for work to be a labour to him."

"A labour that he loves, and that he is as capable of performing as he was twenty years ago," returned old Jones. "No, Mr. Charles, I do not wonder that he should continue to work."

"Did you know that he had been offered a judgeship?"

Old Jones laughed a little. I thought it was as much as to say there was little which concerned the Sergeant that he did not know.

"He has been offered a judgeship more than once—had it pressed upon him, Mr. Charles. The last time was when Mr. Baron Charlton died."

"Why! that is only a month or two ago!"

"Just about nine weeks, I fancy."

"And he declined it?"

"He declines them all."

"But what can be his motive? It would give him more rest than he enjoys now——"

"I don't altogether know that," interrupted the clerk. "The judges are very much over-worked now. It would increase his responsibility; and he is one to feel that, perhaps painfully."

"You mean when he had to pass the dread sentence of death. A new judge must always feel that at the beginning."

"I heard one of our present judges say—it was in this room, too, Mr. Charles—that the first time he put on the black cap he never

closed his eyes the whole night after it. All the Bench are not so sensitive as that, you know."

A thought suddenly struck me. "Surely," I cried, "you do not mean that *that* is the reason for my uncle's refusing a seat on the Bench!"

"Not at all. He'd get over that in time as others do. Oh, no, that has nothing to do with it."

"Then I really cannot see what can have to do with it. It would give him a degree of rest; yes, it would; and it would give him rank and position."

"But it would take from him half his income. Yes, just about half, I reckon," repeated Mr. Jones, attentively regarding the feather of the pen.

"What of that? He must be putting by heaps and heaps of money—and he has neither wife nor child to put by for."

"Ah!" said the clerk, "that is just how we all are apt to judge of a neighbour's business. Would it surprise you very much, sir, if I told you that the Sergeant is *not* putting by?"

"But he must be putting by. Or what becomes of his money?"

"He spends it, Mr. Charles."

"*Spends it!* Upon what?"

"Upon other people."

Mr. Jones looked at me from across the hearthrug and I looked at him. The assertion puzzled me.

"It's true," he said with a nod. "You have not forgotten that great calamity which happened some ten or twelve years ago, Mr. Charles? That bank which went to pieces, and broke up homes and hearts? *Your* money went in it."

As if I could forget that!

"The Sergeant's money, all he had then saved, went in it," continued the clerk. "Mortifying enough, of course, but he was in the full swing of his prosperity, and could soon have replaced it. What he could not so easily replace, Mr. Charles, was the money he had been the means of placing in the bank belonging to other people, and which was lost. He had done it for the best. He held the bank to be thoroughly sound and prosperous; he could not have had more confidence in his own integrity than he had in that bank; and he had counselled friends and others whom he knew, who were not as well off as he was, to invest all they could spare in it, believing he was doing them a kindness. Instead of that, it ruined them."

I thought I saw what the clerk was coming to. After a pause, he went on.

"It is these people that he has been working for, Mr. Charles. Some of them he has entirely repaid—the money, you know, which he caused them to lose. He considered it his duty to recompense them, so far as he could; and to keep them, where they needed to be kept, until he had effected that. For those who were better off

and did not need present help, he put money by as he could spare it, investing it in the funds in their name: I daresay your name is amongst them. That's what Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar does with his income, and that's why he keeps on working."

I had never suspected this.

"I believe it is almost accomplished now," said the clerk. "So nearly that I thought he might, perhaps, have taken the judgeship on this last occasion. But he did not. 'Just a few months longer in harness, Jones,' he said to me, 'and then ——' So I reckon that we shall yet see him on the Bench, Mr. Charles."

"He must be very good."

"Good!" echoed old Jones, with emotion; "he is made of goodness. There are few people like him. He would help the whole world if he could. I don't believe there's any man who has ever done a single service for him of the most trifling nature but he would wish to place beyond the reach of poverty. 'I've put a trifle by for you, Jones,' he said to me the other day, 'in case you might be at a loss for another such place as this when my time's over.' And when I tried to thank him ——"

Mr. Jones broke down. Bringing the quill pen under his eyes, as if he suddenly caught sight of a flaw thereon, I saw a drop of water fall on to it.

"Yes, Mr. Charles, he said that to me. It has taken a load from my mind. When a man is on the downhill of life and is not sure of his future, he can't help being anxious. The Sergeant has paid me a liberal salary, as you may well guess, but he knows that it has not been in my power to put by a fraction of it. 'You are too generous with your money, Sergeant,' I said to him one day a good while ago. 'Ah, no, Jones, not at all,' he answered. 'God has prospered me so marvellously in these later years, what can I do but strive to prosper others.' Those were his very words."

And with these last words of Jones's our conference came to an end. The door was abruptly thrown open by Graham to admit the Sergeant. Mr. Jones helped him off with his wig and gown and handed him the little flaxen top that he wore when not on duty. Then Jones, leaving the room for a few moments, came back with a glass of milk, which he handed to his master.

"Would not a glass of wine do you more good, uncle?" I asked.

"No, lad; not so much. A glass of milk after a hard day's work in Court refreshes me. I never touch wine except at dinner. I take a little then; not much."

Sitting down together when Mr. Jones had again left us, I opened my business to the Sergeant as concisely as possible. He listened attentively, but made no remark until the end.

"Now go over it all again, Charles."

I did so: and this second time I was repeatedly interrupted by remarks or questions. After that we discussed the case.

"I cannot see any reason why you should not take up the matter," he said, when he had given it a little silent consideration. "I do not look upon it quite as you do; I think you have formed a wrong judgment. It is intricate at present; I grant you that; but if you proceed in the manner I have suggested, you will unravel it."

"Thank you, Uncle Stillingfar. I can never thank you enough for all your kindness to me."

"Were you so full of anxiety over this case?" he asked, as we were shaking hands, and I was about to leave. "You look as though you had a weight of it on your brow."

"And so I have, uncle; but not about this case. Something nearer home."

"What *is* it?" he returned, looking at me.

"It is —— Perhaps I had better not tell it you."

"I understand," he slowly said. "Tom Heriot, I suppose. Why does he not get away?"

"He is too ill for that at present: confined to his room and his bed. Of course he does not run quite so great a risk as he did when he persisted in parading the streets, but danger is always imminent."

"He ought to end the danger by getting away. Very ill, is he?"

"So ill that I think danger will soon be all at an end in another way; it certainly will be unless he rallies."

"What is the matter with him?"

"I cannot help fearing that consumption has set in."

"Poor fellow! Oh, Charles, how that fine young man has spoilt his life! Consumption?—Wait a bit—let me think," broke off the Sergeant. "Why, yes, I remember now; it was consumption that Colonel Heriot's first wife died of—Tom's mother."

"Tom said so the last time I saw him."

"Ah. He knows it then. Better not see him too often, Charles. You are running a risk yourself, as you must be aware."

"Yes; I know I am. It is altogether a trial. Good-day, uncle."

I shook hands with Jones as I passed through his room, and ran down the stairs; feeling all the better for my interview with him and with his patron, Mr. Sergeant Stillingfar.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ACCIDENT.

THE drawing-room floor at Lennard's made very comfortable quarters for Tom Heriot, and his removal from the room in Southwark had been accomplished without difficulty. Mrs. Lennard, a patient, mild, weak woman, who could never have been strong-minded, made him an excellent nurse, her more practical and very capable daughter, Charlotte, aiding her when necessary.

A safer refuge could not have been found in London. The Lennards were so often under a cloud themselves as regarded pecuniary matters, so beset at times by their unwelcome creditors—the butcher, baker and grocer, that the chain of their front door was kept habitually fastened, and no one was admitted within its portals without being first of all subjected to a comprehensive survey. Had some kind friend made a rush to the perambulating policeman of the district, to inform him that the domicile of those Lennards was again in a state of siege, he would simply have speculated upon whether the enemy was this time the landlord or the Queen's taxes. It chanced to be neither; but it was well for the besieged to favour the impression that it was one or the other, or both. Policemen do not wage war with unfortunate debtors, and Mr. Lennard's house was as safe as a remote castle.

"Mr. Brown" Tom was called there; none of the household, with the exception of its master, having any idea that it was not his true name. "One of the gentlemen clerks in Essex Street, who has no home in London; I have undertaken to receive him while he is ill," Mr. Lennard had carelessly remarked to his wife and daughters before introducing Tom. They had unsuspecting minds, except as regarded their own creditors, those ladies—ladies always, though fallen from their former state—and never thought to question the statement, or to be at all surprised that Mr. Strange himself took an interest in his clerk's illness and paid an evening visit to him now and then. The doctor who was called in, a hard-worked practitioner named Purfleet, did his best for "Mr. Brown," but had no time to spare for curiosity about him in any other way, or to give so much as a thought to his antecedents.

And just at first, after being settled at Lennard's, Tom Heriot seemed to be taking a turn for the better. The warmth of the comfortable rooms, the care given to him, the strengthening diet, and perhaps a feeling that he was in a safer asylum than he had yet found, all had their effect upon him for good.

"Hatch!" called out Mrs. Brightman.

Hatch ran in from the next room. "Yes, ma'am."

"Let Perry go and tell the gardener to cut some of his best grapes, white and purple, and do you arrange them in a basket. I shall go up to Essex Street and see my daughter this afternoon, and will take them to her. Order the carriage for half-past two o'clock."

"Miss Annabel will be finely pleased to see you, ma'am!" remarked Hatch.

"Possibly so. But she is no longer Miss Annabel. Go and see about the grapes."

When Mrs. Brightman's tones were cold and haughty, and they sounded especially so just now, she brooked no dilatoriness in those

who had to obey her behests. Hatch turned away immediately, and went along talking to herself.

"She's getting cross and restless again. I'm certain of it. In a week's time from this we shall have her as bad as before. And for ever so many weeks now she has been as cautious and sober as a judge! Hang the drink, then! Doctors may well call it a disease when it comes to this stage with people. Here—I say, Perry!"

The butler, passing along the hall, heard Hatch's call, and stopped. She gave her cap-strings a fling backwards as she advanced to him.

"You are to go and tell Church to cut a basket of grapes, and to mix 'em, white and black. The very best and ripest that is in the greenhouse; they be for Miss Annabel."

"All right, I'll go at once," answered Perry. "But you need not snap a man's nose off, Hatch, or look as if you were going to eat him. What has put you out?"

"Enough has put me out; and you might know that, old Perry, if you had any sense," retorted Hatch. "When do I snap people's noses off—which it's my tone, I take it, that you mean—except I'm that bothered and worried I can't speak sweet?"

"Well, what's amiss?" asked Perry.

They were standing close together, and Hatch lowered her voice to a whisper. "The missis is going off again; I be certain sure on't."

"No!" cried Perry, full of dismay. "But, look here, Hatch"—suddenly diving into one of his pockets—"she can't have done it; here's the cellar key. I can be upon my word that there's not a drain of anything out."

"You always did have the brains of a turkey, you know, Perry," was Hatch's gracious rejoinder, "and I'm tired of reminding you of it. Who said missis had took anything? Not me. She haven't—yet. As you observe, there's nothing up for her to take. But she'll be ordering you to bring something up before to-morrow's over; perhaps before to-day is."

"Dear, dear!" lamented the faithful servant. "Don't you think you may be mistaken, Hatch? What do you judge by?"

"I judge by herself. I've not lived with my missis all these years without learning to notice signs and tokens. Her manner to-day and her restlessness is just as plain as the sun in the sky. I know what it means, and you'll know it too, as soon as she gives you her orders to unlock the cellar."

"Can nothing be done?" cried the unhappy Perry. "Could I lose the key of the cellar, do you think, Hatch? Would that be of any good?"

"It would hold good just as long as you'd be in getting a hammer and poker to break it open with; you've not got to deal with a pack of schoolboys that's under control," was Hatch's sarcastic reproof. "But I think there's one thing we might try, Perry, and that is, run

round to Mr. Close and tell him about it. Perhaps he could give her something to stop the craving."

"I'll go," said Perry. "I'll slip round when I've told Church about the grapes."

"And the carriage is ordered early—half-past two; so mind you are in readiness," concluded Hatch.

Perry went to the surgeon's, after delivering his orders to the gardener. But Mr. Close was not at home, and the man came away again without leaving any message; he did not choose to enter upon the subject with Mr. Dunn, the assistant. The latter inquired who was ill, and Perry replied that nobody was; he had only come to speak a private word to Mr. Close, which could wait. In point of fact, he meant to call later.

But the curiosity of Mr. Dunn, who was a very inquisitive young man, fonder of attending to other people's business than of doing his own, had been aroused by this. He considered Perry's manner rather mysterious, as well as the suppression of the message, and he enlarged upon the account to Mr. Close when he came in. Mr. Close made no particular rejoinder; but in his own mind he felt little doubt that Mrs. Brightman was breaking out again, and determined and go to see her when he had had his dinner.

Perry returned home, and waited on his mistress at luncheon, quaking inwardly all the time, as he subsequently confessed to Hatch, lest she should ask him for something that was not upon the table. However, she did not do so; but she was very restless, as Perry observed; she ate little, drank no water, and told Perry to bring her a cup of coffee.

At half-past two the carriage stood at the gate, the silver on the horses' harness glittering in the sun. Quickly enough appeared the procession from the house. Mrs. Brightman, upright and impassive, walking with a stately step; Hatch, a shawl or two upon her arm, holding an umbrella over her mistress to shade her from the sun; Perry in the rear, carrying the basket of grapes. Perry would attend his mistress in her drive, as usual, but not Hatch.

The servants were placing the shawls and the grapes in the carriage, and Mrs. Brightman, who hated anything to be done after she had taken her seat, was waiting to enter it, when Mr. Close, the surgeon, came bustling up.

"Going for a drive this fine day!" he exclaimed, as he shook hands with Mrs. Brightman. "I'm glad of that. I had been thinking that perhaps you were not well."

"Why should you think so?" asked she.

"Well, Perry was round at my place this morning, and left a message that he wanted to see me. I ——"

Mr. Close suppressed the remainder of his speech as his gaze suddenly fell on Perry's startled face. The man had turned from the carriage, and was looking at him in helpless, beseeching terror. A

faithful retainer was Perry, an honest butler ; but at a pinch his brains were no better than what Hatch had compared them with—those of a turkey.

Mrs. Brightman, her countenance taking its very haughtiest expression, gazed first at the doctor, then at Perry, as if demanding what this might mean ; possibly, poor lady, she had a suspicion of it. But Hatch, ready Hatch, was equal to the occasion : *she* never lost her presence of mind.

"I told Perry he might just as well have asked young Mr. Dunn for 'em, when he came back without the drops," said she, facing the surgeon and speaking carelessly. "Your not being in didn't matter. It was some cough drops I sent him for ; the same as those you've let us have before, Mr. Close. Our cook's cough is that bad, she can't sleep at night, nor let anybody else sleep that's within earshot of her room."

"Well, I came round in a hurry, thinking some of you might be suffering from this complaint that's going about," said Mr. Close, taking up the clue in an easy manner.

"That there spasadic cholera," assented Hatch.

"Cholera ! It's not cholera. There's nothing of that sort about," said the surgeon. "But there's a good bit of influenza ; I have half-a-dozen patients suffering from it. A spell of bright weather such as this, though, will soon drive it away. And I'll send you some of the drops when I get back, Hatch."

Mrs. Brightman advanced to the carriage ; the surgeon was at hand to assist her in. Perry stood on the other side his mistress. Hatch had retreated to the gate and was looking on.

Suddenly, a yell, as of something unearthly, startled their ears. A fierce-looking bull, frightened probably by the passers-by on the road, and the prods given to it by the formidable stick of its driver, had dashed behind the carriage on to the foot-path, and set up that terrible roar. Mr. Close looked round, Perry did the same ; whilst Mrs. Brightman, who was in the very act of getting into her carriage, and whose nerves were more sensitive than theirs, turned sharply round also and screamed.

Again Hatch came to the rescue. She had closed the umbrella and lodged it against the pillar of the gate, for here they were under the shade of trees. Seizing the umbrella now, she opened it with a great dash and noise, and rushed towards the bull, pointing it menacingly. The animal, no doubt more startled than they were, tore away and gained the high-road again. Then everyone had leisure to see that Mrs. Brightman was lying on the ground, partly under the carriage.

She must have fallen in turning round, partly from fright, partly from the moving of the carriage. The horses had also been somewhat startled by the bull's noise, and one of them began to prance. The coachman had his horses well in hand and soon quieted them but he had not been able to prevent the movement which had no doubt chiefly caused his mistress to fall.

They quickly drew her from under the carriage and attempted to raise her ; but she cried out with such tones of agony that the surgeon feared she was seriously injured. As soon as possible she was conveyed indoors on a mattress. Another surgeon joined Mr. Close, and it was found that her leg was broken near the ankle.

When it had been set and the commotion was subsiding, Perry was despatched to Essex Street with the carriage and the bad news—the carriage to bring back Annabel.

"What was it you really came to my surgery for, Perry?" Mr. Close took an opportunity of asking him before he started.

"It was about my mistress, sir," answered the man. "Hatch felt quite sure, by signs and tokens, that Mrs. Brightman was going to—to—be ill again. She sent me to tell you, sir, and to ask if you couldn't give her something to stop it."

"Ah, I thought as much. But when I saw you all out there, your mistress looking well and about to take a drive, I concluded I had been mistaken," said the surgeon.

I had run upstairs during the afternoon to ask a question of Annabel, and was standing beside her at the drawing-room window, where she sat at work, when a carriage came swiftly down the street, and stopped at the door.

"Why, it is mamma's!" exclaimed Annabel, looking out.

"But I don't see her in it," I rejoined.

"Oh, she must be in it, Charles. Perry is on the box."

Perry was getting down, but was not quite so quick in his movements as a slim young footman would be. He rang the door bell, and I was fetched down to him. In two minutes afterwards I had disclosed the news to my wife, and brought Perry upstairs that she might herself question him. The tears were coursing down her cheeks.

"Don't take on, Miss Annabel," said the man, feeling quite too much lost in the bad tidings to remember Annabel's new title. "There's not the least bit of danger, ma'am ; Mr. Close bade me say it ; all is sure to go on well."

"Did you bring the carriage for me, Perry?"

"Yes, ma'am, I did. And it was my mistress herself thought of it. When Mr. Close, or Hatch, one of 'em it was, I don't know which, told her they were going to send me for you, she said 'Let Perry take the carriage.' Oh, ma'am, indeed she is fully as well as she could be ; it was only at first that she seemed faintish like."

Annabel went back in the carriage at once. I promised to follow her as early in the evening as I could get away. Relying upon the butler's assurance that Mrs. Brightman was not in the slightest danger ; that on the contrary, it would be an illness of weeks, if not of months, there was no necessity for my accompanying Annabel at an inconvenient moment.

"It is, in one sense, the luckiest thing that could have happened

to her," Mr. Close remarked to me that evening when we were conversing together.

"Lucky! How do you mean?"

"Well, she *must* be under our control now," he answered in significant tones, "and we were fearing, only to-day, that she was on the point of breaking out again. A long spell of enforced abstinence such as this may effect wonders."

Of course, looking at it in that light, the accident might be called fortunate. "There's a silver lining to every cloud."

Annabel took up her abode temporarily at her mother's: Mrs. Brightman requested it. I went down there of an evening—though not every evening—returning to Essex Street in the morning. Tom's increasing illness kept me in town occasionally, for I could not help going to see him, and he was growing weaker day by day. The closing features of consumption were gaining upon him rapidly. To add to our difficulties, Mr. Policeman Wren, who seemed to follow Tom's changes of domicile in a very ominous and remarkable manner, had now transferred his beat from Southwark, and might be seen pacing before Lennard's door ten times a day.

One morning when I had come up from Clapham and was seated in my own room opening the letters, Lennard entered. He closed the door with a quiet, cautious movement and waited, without speaking.

"Anything particular, Lennard?"

"Yes, sir; I've brought rather bad news," he said. "Captain Heriot is worse."

"Worse? In what way? But he is not Captain Heriot, Lennard; he is Mr. Brown. Be careful."

"We cannot be overheard," he answered, glancing at the closed door. "He appeared so exceedingly weak last night that I thought I would sit up with him for an hour or two, and then lie down on his sofa for the rest of the night. About five o'clock this morning, he had a violent fit of coughing and broke a blood vessel."

"What did you do?"

"I know a little of the treatment necessary in such cases, and we got the doctor to him as soon as possible. Mr. Purfleet does not give the slightest hope now. In fact, he thinks that a very few days more will bring the ending."

I sat back in my chair. Poor Tom! Poor Tom!

"It is the best for him, Mr. Charles," spoke Lennard, with some emotion. "Better, infinitely, than that of which he has been running the risk. When a man's life is marred as he has marred his, Heaven must seem like a haven of refuge to him."

"Has he any idea of his critical state?"

"Yes; and I feel sure is quite reconciled to it. He remarked this morning how much he should like to see Blanche: meaning, I presume, Lady Level."

"Ah, but there are difficulties in the way, Lennard. I will come to him myself, but not until evening. There's no immediate danger, you tell me, and I do not care to be seen entering your house during the day while he is in it. That big policeman might be on the watch, and ask me what I wanted there."

Lennard left the room and I returned to my letters. The next I took up was a note from Blanche. Lord Level was not *yet* back from Marshdale, she told me in it; he kept writing miserable scraps of notes in which he put her off with excuses from day to day, always assuring her he hoped to be up on the morrow. But she could see she was being played with; and the patience which, in obedience to me and Major Carlen, she had been exercising, was very nearly exhausted. She wrote this, she concluded by saying, to warn me that it was so.

Truth to say, I did wonder what was keeping Level at Marshdale. He had been there more than a week now.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LAST DAYS.

TOM HERIOT lay on his sofa in his bedroom, the fire-light flickering on his faded face. This was Monday, the third day since the attack spoken of by Lennard, and there had not been any return of it. His voice was stronger this evening; he seemed better altogether, and was jesting, as he loved to do. Leah had been to see him during the day, and he was recounting one or two of their passages-at-arms, with much glee.

"Charley, old fellow, you look as solemn as a judge."

Most likely I did. I sat on the other side the hearthrug, gazing as I listened to him; and I thought I saw in his face the greyness that frequently precedes death.

"Did you know that that giant of the force, Wren, had his eye upon me, Charley?"

"No! Why do you say so?"

"Well, I think he has—some suspicion, at any rate. He parades before the house like a walking apparition. I look at him from behind the curtains in the other room. He paraded in like manner, you know, before that house in Southwark and the other one in Lambeth."

"It may be only a coincidence, Tom. The police are moved about a good deal from beat to beat, I fancy."

"Perhaps so," assented Tom carelessly. "If he came in and took me I don't think he could do much with me now. He accosted Purfleet to-day."

"Accosted Purfleet!"

Tom nodded. "After his morning visit to me, he went dashing out of the street-door in his usual quick way, and dashed against

Wren. One might think a regiment of soldiers were always waiting to have their legs and arms cut off, and that Purfleet had to do it, by the way he rushes about," concluded Tom.

"Well?"

"'In a hurry this morning, doctor,' says old Wren, who is uncommonly fond of hearing himself talk. 'And who is it that's ill at Mr. Lennard's?' 'I generally am in a hurry,' says Purfleet, 'and so would you be if you had as many sick people on your hands. At Lennard's? Why that poor suffering daughter of his has had another attack, and I don't know whether I shall save her.' And, with that, Purfleet got away. He related this to me when he came in at tea-time."

A thought struck me. "But, Tom, does Purfleet know that you are in concealment here? Or why should he have put his visits to you upon Maria Lennard?"

"Why, how could he be off knowing it? Lennard asked him at first, as a matter of precaution, not to speak of me in the neighbourhood. Mr. Brown was rather under a cloud just now, he said. I wouldn't mind betting a silver sixpence, Charley, that he knows I am Tom Heriot."

I wondered whether Tom was joking.

"Likely enough," went on Tom. "He knows that you come to see me, and that you are Mr. Strange of Essex Street. And he has heard, I'll lay, that Mr. Strange had a wicked sort of half-brother, one Captain Heriot, who fell into the fetters of the law and escaped them, and—and may be the very Mr. Brown who's lying ill here. Purfleet can put two and two together as cleverly as other people, Charles."

"If so, it is frightfully hazardous ——"

"Not at all," interrupted Tom with equanimity. "He'd no more betray me, Charley, than he'd betray himself. Doctors don't divulge the secrets of their patients; they keep them. It is a point of honour in the medical code: as well as of self-interest. What family would call in a man who was known to run about saying the Smiths next door had veal for dinner to-day, and they ought to have had mutton? If no more harm reaches me than any brought about by Purfleet, I am safe enough."

It might be as he said. And I saw that he would be incautious to the end.

At that moment Mrs. Lennard came in with something in a breakfast cup. "You are a good lady," said Tom gratefully. "See how they feed me up, Charley."

But for the hollow tones, the hectic flush and the brilliant eyes, it might almost have been thought he was getting better. The cough had nearly left him, and the weakness was not more apparent than it had been for a week past. But that faint, deep, *far away* sounding voice, which had now come on, told the truth—that the close was near at hand.

After Mrs. Lennard had left the room with the empty cup, Tom lay back on the sofa, put his head on the pillow, and in a minute or two seemed to be asleep. Presently I moved gently across the hearthrug to fold the warm, light quilt upon his knees. He opened his eyes.

"You need not creep, Charley. I am not asleep. I had a regular good sleep in the afternoon, and don't feel inclined for it now. I was thinking about the funeral."

"The funeral!" I echoed, taken back. "Whose funeral?"

"Mine. They won't care to lay me by my mother, will they? I mean my own mother. The world might put its inquisitive word in, and say that must be Tom Heriot, the felon. Neither you nor Level would like that, nor old Carlen either."

I made no answer; uncertain what to say.

"Yet I should like to lie by her," he went on. "There was a large vault made, when she died, to hold the three of us—herself, my father and me. *They* are in it; I should like to be placed with them."

"Time enough to think of that, Tom, when—when—the time comes," I stammered.

"The time's not far off now, Charley."

"Two nights ago, when I was here, you assured me you were getting better."

"Well, I thought I might be; there are such ups and downs in a man's state. He will appear sick unto death to-day, and to-morrow be driving down to a whitebait dinner at Greenwich. I've changed my opinion, Charley; I've had my warning."

"Had your warning! What does that mean?"

"I should like to see Blanche," he whispered. "Dear little Blanche! How I used to tease her in our young days, and Leah would box my ears for it; and I teased you also, Charley. Could you not bring her here, if Level would let her come?"

"Tom, I hardly know. For one thing, she has not heard anything of the past trouble, as you are aware. She thinks you are in India with the regiment, and calls you a very undutiful brother for not writing to her. I suppose it might be managed."

"Dear little Blanche!" he repeated. "Yes, I teased her—and loved her all the time. Just one visit, Charley. It will be the last until we meet upon the eternal shore. Try and contrive it."

I sat thinking how it might be done—the revelation to Blanche, bringing her to the house, and obtaining the consent of Lord Level; for I should not care to stir in it without his consent. Tom appeared to be thinking also, and a silence ensued. It was he who broke it.

"Charles!"

"Yes?"

"Do you ever recall events that passed in our old life at White Littleham Rectory; do any of them lie in your memory?"

"I think all of them lie in it," I answered. "My memory is, you know, a remarkably good one."

"Ay," said Tom. And then he paused again. "Do you recollect that especial incident when your father told us of his dream?" he continued presently. "I picture the scene now; it has been present to my mind all day. A frosty winter morning, icicles on the trees and frosty devices on the window-panes. You and I and your father seated round the breakfast-table; Leah pouring out the coffee and cutting bread-and-butter for us. He appeared to be in deep thought, and when I remarked upon it, and you asked him what he was thinking of, he said his dream. D'you mind it, lad?"

"I do. The thing made an impression on me. The scene and what passed at it are as plain to me now as though it had happened yesterday. After saying he was thinking of his dream, he added, in a dubious tone, 'if it *was* a dream!' Mr. Penthorn came in while he was telling it."

"He was fast asleep; had gone to bed in the best of health, probably concocting matter for next Sunday's sermon," resumed Tom, recalling the facts. "Suddenly, he awoke by the sound of a voice. It was his late wife's voice; your mother, Charley. He was wide awake on the instant, and knew the voice for hers; she appeared to be standing at the bed-side."

"But he did not see her," I put in.

"No; he never said he saw her," replied Tom Heriot. "But the impression was upon him that a figure stood there, and that after speaking it retreated towards the window. He got up and struck a light and found the room empty, no trace of anyone's having been in it. Nevertheless, he could not get rid of the belief, though not a superstitious man, that it was his wife who came to him."

"In the spirit."

"In the spirit, of course. He knew her voice perfectly, he said. Mr. Penthorn rather ridiculed the matter; saying it was nothing but a vivid dream. I don't think it made much impression upon your father, except that it puzzled him."

"I don't think it did," I assented, my thoughts all in the past. "As you observe, Tom, he was not superstitious; he held no particular belief in the supernatural."

"No; it faded from all our minds with the day—Leah's perhaps excepted. But what was the result? On the fourth night afterwards he died. The dream occurred on the Friday morning a little before three o'clock; your father looked at his watch when he got out of bed and saw that it wanted a quarter to three. On Tuesday morning at a quarter to three he died in his study, into which he had been carried after his accident."

All true. The circumstances, to me, were painful even now.

"Well, what do you make of it, Charles?"

"Nothing. But I don't quite understand your question."

"Do you think his wife really came to him?—That she was permitted to come back to earth to warn him of his approaching death?"

"I have always believed that. I can hardly see how anyone could doubt it."

"Well, Charley, I did. I was a graceless, light-headed young wight, you know, and serious things made no impression on me. If I thought about it at all, it was to put it down to fancy; or a dream, as Mr. Penthorn said; and I don't believe I've ever had the thing in my mind from that time to this."

"And why should it come back to you now?" I asked.

"Because," answered Tom, "I think I have had a similar warning."

"What can you mean, Tom?"

"It was last night," he answered; "or, rather, this morning. I was in bed, and pretty soundly asleep, for me, and I began to dream. I thought I saw my father come in through the door, that one opening to the passage, cross the room and sit down by the bed-side with his face turned to me. I mean my own father, Colonel Heriot. He looked just as he used to look; not a day older; his fine figure erect, his bright, wavy hair brushed off his brow as he always wore it, his blue eyes smiling and kindly. I was not in the least surprised to see him; his coming in seemed to be quite a matter of course. 'Well, Thomas,' he began, looking hard at me after he had sat down; 'we have been parted for some time and I have much to say to you.' 'Say it now, papa,' I answered, going back in my dream to the language of childhood's days. 'There's not time now,' he replied; 'we must wait a little yet; it won't be for long, Thomas.' Then I saw him rise from the chair, re-cross the room to the door, turn to look at me with a smile, and go out, leaving the door open. I awoke in a moment; at the very moment, I am certain; and for some little time I could not persuade myself that what had passed was not reality. The chair in which he had sat stood at the bed-side, and the door was wide open."

"But I suppose the chair had been there all night, and that someone was sitting up with you? Whoever it was must have opened the door."

"The chair had been there all night," assented Tom. "But the door had *not* been opened by human hands, so far as I can learn. It was old Faith's turn to sit up last night—that worthy old soul of a servant who has clung to the Lennards through all their misfortunes. Finding that I slept comfortably, Faith had fallen asleep too in the big chair in that corner behind you. She declared that the door had been firmly shut—and I believe she thought it was I who had got up and opened it."

"It was a dream, Tom."

"Granted. But it was a warning. It came—nay, who can say it

was not *he* who came—to show me that I shall soon be with him. We shall have time, and to spare, to talk then. I have never had so vivid a dream in my life; or one that so left behind it the impression that it had been reality.”

“Well ——”

“Look here,” he interrupted. “Your father said, if you remember, that the visit paid to him, whether real or imaginary, by his wife and the words she spoke, had revived within him his recollections of her voice, which had in a slight degree begun to fade. Well, Charles, I give you my word that I had partly forgotten my father’s appearance; I was only a little fellow when he died; but his visit to me in my dream last night has brought it back most vividly. Come, you wise old lawyer, what do you say to that?”

“I don’t know, Tom. Such things *are*, I suppose.”

“If I got well and lived to be a hundred years old, I should never laugh at them again.”

“Did you tell Leah this when she was here to-day?”

“Ay; and of course she burst out crying. ‘Take it as it’s meant, Master Tom,’ said she ‘and prepare yourself. It is your warning.’ Just as she had told your father, Charles, that that other was *his* warning. She was right then; she is right now.”

“You cannot know it. And you must not let this trouble you.”

“It does not trouble me,” he answered quickly. “Rather the contrary, for it sets my mind at rest. I have had little hope of myself for some time past, and this dream-visit of my father has shown me the truth beyond all doubt; and now I have only to make my packet, as the French say, and wait for the signal to start.”

We talked together a little longer, but my time was up. I left him for the night and apparently in the best of spirits.

Lennard was alone when I got downstairs. I asked him whether he had heard of this fancy of Tom’s about the dream.

“Yes,” he answered. “He told me about it this evening, when I was sitting with him after tea; but he did not seem at all depressed by it. I don’t think it matters much either way,” added Lennard thoughtfully, “for the end cannot be far off now.”

“He has an idea that Purfleet guesses who he really is.”

“But he has no grounds for saying it,” returned Lennard. “Purfleet heard when he was first called in that ‘Mr. Brown’ wished to be kept en cachette, if I may so put it; but that he should guess him to be Captain Heriot is quite improbable. Because Captain Heriot is aware of his own identity, he assumes that other people must needs be aware of it.”

“One might trust Purfleet not to betray him, I fancy, if he does guess it.”

“That I am sure of,” said Lennard warmly. “He is kind and benevolent. Most medical men are so from their frequent contact with the dark shades of life, whether of sickness or of sorrow. As

to Purfleet, he is too hard-worked, poor man, to have much leisure for speculating upon the affairs of other people."

"Wren is still walking about here."

"Yes; but I think he has been put upon this beat in the ordinary routine of things, not that he is looking after anyone in particular. Mr. Strange, if he had any suspicion of Captain Heriot in Lambeth, he would have taken him; he would have taken him again when in Southwark; and he would, ere this, have taken him here. Wren appears to be one of those gossiping men who must talk to everybody; and I believe that is just all the mystery."

Wishing Lennard good night, I went home to Essex Street, and sat down to write to Lord Level. He would not receive the letter at Marshdale until the following afternoon, but it would be in time for him to answer me by the evening post.

(To be concluded.)



THE KISS.

THE snows are white on wood and wold,
The wind is in the firs;
So dead my heart is with the cold,
No pulse within it stirs,
Even to see your face, my dear,
Your face that was my sun:
The ice enshrouds the buried year,
And summer's dreams are done.

The snakes that lie about my heart
Are in their wintry sleep:
Their fangs no more deal sting and smart,
No more they curl and creep.
Love with the rose has ceased to be,
The frost is firm and fast;
Oh! keep the summer far from me,
And let the snakes' sleep last!

Touch of your hand could not suffice
To waken them once more,
Nor could the sunshine of your eyes
A ruined spring restore.
But ah! your lips! You know the rest:
The snows are summer rain;
My eyes are wet, and in my breast
The snakes' fangs meet again.

E. NESBIT.

PRECEPTS FOR THE WELL-ORDERING OF LIFE.

ON PATIENCE.

"ALL things come to him who can wait," says the French proverb. And indeed there can hardly be a better test of a man's general capacity than his powers of waiting. Just self-appreciation, ability to judge one's own worth, are wrapt up in it; and no end of traits besides, as self-control and will.

For it is not to be assumed for a moment that the proverb means a mere listless standing idle—that would be nonsense—but rather educated self-dependence, which can go along quietly in the faith of justice, and wait for a due recognition being in good time accorded to work well done: and if the latter never comes, there is the satisfaction of having done the work well.

There is an Eastern proverb which quaintly puts the same truth: "Time and patience change the mulberry leaf to satin;" and a Kanuri proverb, for quaintness and beauty, may well be put alongside it: "At the bottom of patience there is heaven."

On no point are great writers more at one than on this, and their deliverances might be regarded as sermons on the texts of proverbs that are to be found amongst all peoples—savage as well as civilised—in praise of the virtue of patience. Thus we find Theocritus singing:—

"Yet, patience, friend! to-morrow fortune's ray
May shine with comfort, though it lowers to day;
Hopes to the living, not the dead remain,
And the soft season brightens after rain."

Patience is a kind of passive courage. More true courage, indeed, is shown in it than by the heroes of great military achievements, for they always have the accompaniments of excitement and sympathy.

Patience is more especially a virtue of women than of men, and what gracious heroines, martyrs, saints may they not become by the practice of it. This is the view of our great dramatists: of Shakespeare in particular, whose grandest heroines exhibit the quality in the most effective circumstances.

The tendency of men is to expect the immediate results of their work and effort; women, both from their education and their constitution, are less exacting as regards outward results. They rest

more on the satisfaction of work duly done. In "Macbeth" we have this expression :—

"Come what, come may,
Time and the hour run through the roughest day."

"To know how to wait," says the wise de Maistre, "is the great secret of success." Sir Walter Scott was especially good in praise of patience, as though it was a virtue he had himself often put to the test. "Do not let your impatience mar the web of your prudence," he makes one of his characters say to another; and he thus, in one of his poems, puts the sentiment to rhyme :—

"Be patient, be patient, for patience hath power
To ward us in danger like mantle in shower."

Longfellow, like Sir Walter Scott, seems to have felt himself indebted to patience. Not only in his poems, but in his prose writings, he magnifies it. No one will ever forget the lines :—

"Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait."

which we accept as but another fine rendering of the French proverb with which we started; and in "Hyperion" we have this admirable piece of eloquence :

"After all," continued Fleming, "perhaps the greatest lesson which can be taught us is told in a single word—Wait! Every man must patiently bide his time. He must wait. More particularly in lands like my native land, where the pulse of life beats with such feverish and impatient throbs, is the lesson needful. We seem to live in the midst of a battle—there is such a din, such a hurrying to and fro. In the streets of a crowded city it is difficult to walk slowly. You feel the rushing of the crowd and rush with it onward. In the press of our life it is difficult to be calm. In this stress of wind and tide all professions seem to drag their anchors, and are swept out into the main. The voices of the present say—Come! But the voices of the past say—Wait! With calm and solemn footsteps the rising tide bears against the rushing torrent up stream, and pushes back the hurrying waters. With no less calm and solemn footsteps, nor less certainty, does a great mind bear up against opposition or public opinion, and push back the hurrying stream. Therefore should every man wait—should bide his time. Not in listless idleness, not in useless pastime, not in querulous dejection; but in constant, steady, cheerful endeavour, always willing and fulfilling and accomplishing his task, that, when the occasion comes, he may be equal to the occasion. . . . Believe me, the talent of success is nothing more than doing what you can do well, and doing well whatever you do."

In Douglas Jerrold's "Hermit" we have this fine parable :—

"Patience!—why, patience wanted a nightingale; patience waited, and the egg sang." Cowper was not a man of action, but a recluse and a student, but he had his own toils and inward struggles against melancholy, and thus he sings:—

"Beware of desperate steps! the darkest day,
Live till to-morrow, will have passed away."

Benjamin Franklin, who was a practical man and knew nothing of the sensitive tortures of Cowper, is at one with him here: "By diligence and patience the mouse cut in two the cable." Mrs. Browning emphasises the same truth through the mouth of her heroine, Aurora Leigh:

"I worked with patience, which means almost power."

Goethe's works teem with tributes to a virtue which certainly he did not fail to practice.

"Was the world not made at once, then?" asked Felix, in "Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre."

"Hardly," answered Jarno; "good bread needs baking."

And here is an anecdote which puts the same truth in a more playful, if not more apt, manner than the preceding:

"You can do anything if you have only patience," said an old uncle, who had made a fortune, to a nephew who had nearly spent one. "Water may be carried in a sieve, if you can only wait."

"How long?" asked the petulant spendthrift, who was impatient for the old man's obituary.

His uncle coolly replied: "Till it freezes!"

Patience in a leader is a necessary quality. This the Duke of Wellington possessed, and in this he outdid his great enemy, Napoleon, who had, perhaps, far more of what we call inborn genius. But even that, without patience, will not suffice in the end. Genius, without patience, is apt to become, instead of a blessing, a curse. Napoleon often showed querulous impatience, and was apt to distribute his smiles or frowns very arbitrarily through this tendency. A writer in the *Saturday Review* has put this point so well and forcibly that we must quote his words:—

"As a rule, nothing more incapacitates a man for the lead than impatience. No constitutionally impatient man, who has indulged his tendency, ever gets to the bottom of things, or knows with any nicety the standing, disposition and circumstances of the people he is thrown, or has thrown himself, amongst. Certain salient points he is possessed of, but not what reconciles and accounts for them. Something in him—an obtrusive self, or a train of thought, or likings and antipathies—will always come between him and an impartial judgment. Neither does he win confidence, for he checks the coy, uncertain advances which are the precursors of it. We doubt if a thoroughly impatient man can read the heart, or be a fair critic, or

understand the rights of any knotty question, or make himself master of any difficult situation. The power of waiting, deliberating, hanging in suspense, is necessary for all these—the power of staving off for considerable periods of time mere personal leanings. We shall constantly find impatient persons, whatever their natural powers, possessed by mistaken impressions, and taking mistaken views of people and things. . . . We have spoken of waiting as a power, and much might be said on this point ; for to know how long to wait, and when to cease waiting, how long to pause and when to resolve, constitutes in no small degree the virtue of punctuality and the proper limits of patience.”

Frederick von Logau, from whom the poet Longfellow drew some of his inspirations, has this neat verselet among his axioms :—

“ Softly goes he o’er the ways
Who Patience to the burden lays.”

Mr. Ruskin in his “Ethics of the Dust” has such an exquisite prose-hymn in praise of patience as the perfecter of work, and the only true medium of enjoyment for the workers, that we must crave leave to quote it :—

“There is no music in a rest, Katie, that I know of ; but there’s the making of music in it. And people are always missing that part of the life-melody, and scrambling on without counting—not that it’s easy to count ; but nothing on which so much depends ever *is* easy. People are always talking of perseverance and courage, and fortitude ; but patience is the finest and worthiest part of fortitude—and the rarest, too. I know twenty persevering girls for one patient one ; but it is only that twenty-first one who can do her work, out and out, and enjoy it. For patience lies at the root of all pleasures, as well as of all powers. Hope herself ceases to be happiness, when Impatience companions her. . . . The Patience who really smiles at grief usually stands, or walks, or even runs ; she seldom sits ; though she may sometimes *have* to do it, for many a day, poor thing, by monuments ; or like Chaucer’s, with face pale, upon a hill of sand.”



THE DUEL.

I.

I DO not hate tourists, but for one who spends the most of the year in cities like Rome and Florence, it is desirable to get away from society for the summer holidays, and live alone with books and nature, among unsophisticated peasants.

I once found a glorious spot, absolutely cut off from the world, there being no road to it, the traveller having to descend the mountain by a break-neck path on horseback. It was perfectly primitive, the people wild and shy, very poor, but not begging at all. It is true there was hardly anything to eat except dark, sour bread and wine. I had prudently provided myself with coffee; could I have some milk? Yes, but the cows had not come home yet. At what hour did they return? It was uncertain; whenever they felt disposed. When I asked for a candle the girl brought me a taper about a yard long, which she put into my hand as if I were going to walk in a religious procession, and which she had sacrilegiously taken from the church.

"Here is an undiscovered country," I said, and began to think how I was to make the rooms habitable. I suddenly remembered having seen a square, ugly, tasteless house inside a large enclosure with a gate, and I asked the young woman who was the owner. She named him, adding: "That is the new hotel."

"What!" I exclaimed. "An hotel, when you have no road even for oxen!"

"Oh," said the pretty creature, rippling all over with smiles at the joyous intelligence: "they are just beginning to make a road on *the other side of the mountain!*"

I ruefully packed my valise and departed next morning. Then I began a series of excursions, travelling exclusively by diligence. In these conveyances I never met a man or woman of my race, and, needless to say, none of the upper class Italians, who use their own carriages going to and fro between the city and their villas. I had thus a good opportunity of improving my acquaintance with the people. And I like the *popolo Toscano*; they are courteous, intelligent, honest; and if they only could be persuaded to use a little more soap and water they would be "the finest peasantry in the world."

The diligences were cheap and uncomfortable; the cheapness, it must be confessed, did not come amiss to a poor young author fond of rambling; and for the rest one learns to "adapt himself" to circumstances, as the Italians express it. There was a seat outside, just behind the driver, which held three persons, and when this

was fully occupied it closed up the best ventilation we had. My heart used to sink when I beheld a pair of dirty red-brown shoes mounting, and found my favourite window darkened by the capacious back of a farmer, butcher, baker, or blacksmith, as the case might be.

One day, looking out through a side window, I saw a well-made, gentlemanly figure in a perfectly-fitting suit of summer grey spring lightly to the front seat, showing a small aristocratic boot with an arched instep. The young man had his back to my favourite window, but being slight, he did not close it up, and when he saw me looking out he politely moved to one side. He wore gloves, too; a rather unusual thing in the diligence; for when an exceptionally fastidious person appeared with gloves, he or she soon removed them, seeing that they were not the mode and out of place.

After a stage or two the gentleman presented himself at the door, and said: "The sun is so hot that I should like to come inside if it will not inconvenience these gentlemen."

"Venga, venga," was the general answer, and all made room with that ready courtesy which seldom fails in a Tuscan assembly of any class. The young man got to the upper end of the coach, opposite to me, and next a priest. They saluted each other by name, and shook hands.

"Padre Morelli!"

"Signor Giulioesare! You are going to your castello for a little fresh air?" returned the priest.

"Yes; and to look after the contadini. And you?"

"I go precisely in the same direction, to the fête of San Severino. The Curato is a friend of mine, and has invited me to assist at the functions. This weather one is glad to escape from the town for a few days. San Severino is cool and pleasant."

"How high above sea level is San Severino," I asked.

"I do not exactly know. I am not curious!" replied the priest. But the young man, who rejoiced in the name of Julius Caesar, told me.

"I am not actuated by idle curiosity," I replied. "I am in search of a cool, tranquil spot, where I can spend two or three months of summer."

"You would be tired of San Severino in two days," observed the young man. "There is no object of interest. The church is quite ordinary, unadorned by works of art of any merit. It is a poor village commune of about one thousand souls. The only recommendation is the fine air and the pleasing landscape."

"Is there any sort of hotel where one could be accommodated?"

"Che, che!"

"I am not difficult. I can adapt myself."

"Well, I believe there is a spare room at the café, though I never heard of anyone occupying it."

"And where do travellers put up?"

"Travellers? My dear sir, no travellers ever come to the out-of-the-way, God-forgotten spot which is San Severino," replied Julius Cæsar.

"But the diligence is full of people."

"These belong to the places in the neighbouring country. If an occasional visitor arrives, he is entertained at the house of his relatives or friends."

"Delightful!" I exclaimed. "This is the place I have long sought in vain."

At this the reverendo pricked up his ears and eyed me suspiciously. Drawing his long black gown over his knees with a cautious air, he said:

"The signore is tired of society?"

"Yes; I seek retirement for a time."

"Why not go into a monastery?"

"Is there a monastery where an extern might lodge?" I inquired.

"A very fine Franciscan monastery not half a mile from the town. Alas! it is not what it once was; but for one who seeks a temporary retirement its gates are open."

The young man smiled and said:

"But, reverendo, the English gentleman might not care for the society of the good frati always lamenting their wrongs."

"It depends," returned the priest. And they both looked at me expecting me to say with what party I sympathised. I maintained a reserved tone, and replied:

"I should live by myself, occupied with my own studies." I think the priest suspected that I was a fugitive, if not from the law, at least from society, and that the sanctuary of a monastery was just suited to my case.

The conversation then turned on the difficulties of our respective languages, and I found Signor Giulio Cesare knew some English, as most young Italians do now, and was familiar with our best authors, which he read in the original. This was a pleasing variety in the monotony of diligence travelling; but I was destined to have another surprise in the course of the journey.

We were congratulating ourselves on the departure of two peasants, and enjoying the room they had vacated, when the coach pulled up at the gate of a villa. There was a party of five, but only three wanted seats. A handsome, blooming young lady with a radiant complexion and little auburn curls on her white forehead; dress, an intricate blending of black and crushed strawberry, a hat turned up at one side, long silk gloves, and gold bracelets outside them. A second lady, still younger, slight, dark-haired, in a cream-coloured china silk dust cloak, broad-leaved Tuscan hat, with a little trembling sheaf of corn and poppies mixed. A beautiful child of three or four years, evidently the daughter of the handsome blonde, in white frock and blue sash—little frock and much sash. The girl in the dust

cloak and straw hat was silent and quiet, while the handsome lady in crushed strawberry was talkative and vivacious.

"Per l'amor di cielo!" she exclaimed: "is this the vehicle that they put on the road in such murderous heat? Can you give a seat outside to the signorina? She cannot bear the close air inside. Make her ill? Yes, surely. It would make anyone ill. My dear, you must hold your face to the window; there's no help for it. Good-bye, Luigi; good-bye, Emilia: many thanks. If you only knew what a delicious place this is! It is an inferno!"

And the lady smiled sweetly as she waved her fan to her friends, and then looked round at her fellow passengers with a compassionating air. At that moment she caught the eye of the young advocate—I had learnt his profession from his talk with the priest—who was just saluting her companion.

They shook hands, evidently surprised at meeting each other there, and the lady explained that an accident to a horse had obliged them to return to their own villa in the diligence. They seemed pleased to see each other, and began to talk in an animated manner. Giulioesare caressed the child, stroked her long, golden hair, and when she insisted on standing on the seat to look out, he held her carefully by the big sash. The lovely sprite, like most pretty children, knew she was admired, and was full of bewitching coquetries. Young Italians are much more fond of children than young Englishmen; but still, I half expected that so much devotion to the infant was partly for the sake of the pretty mamma.

"Are you sleepy, Minerva?" asked the married lady suddenly.

"No: why sleepy?" returned the girl.

"You are so silent."

"I hope the heat does not incommode the signorina," said the advocate. "Would you like my place? It is more shady. Yes, pray do me the favour."

And he handed her with a stately politeness to his corner.

She was now opposite me, and I began to observe her, as one cannot help doing when one is vis-à-vis with another in a coach. She had a clear, pale skin, brown hair and soft brown eyes: not so striking or attractive in appearance as her companion, but thoughtful and interesting. Her hands were very small, and the thin silk gloves she wore did not conceal their beautiful form.

Signor Giulioesare had drawn me into the conversation by asking me questions about England for the benefit of the ladies: and so I began to talk a little to them, too, and had the pleasure of hearing my own language spoken tolerably by the young lady, and lisped very prettily by the child, whom she had taught, who was her cousin. The time passed much more pleasantly than usual in the diligence, and it seemed but a short space when the ladies got out at the gate of their villa, about two miles from San Severino.

"Ecco casa mia," said the advocate, as we approached the ancient

village, pointing to an imposing edifice standing on a slight eminence, with a high square tower.

"What a grand old castle ! And do you live there all alone with your servants, signore ?" I asked : for I had been informed previously that he had no parents or family. He laughed.

"I occupy a very modest quarter on the ground floor. My retainers are very easily accommodated. A contadino and his wife, who live on the premises, lend me all the service I need."

"What a pity !" I exclaimed, thinking I saw before me the last scion of a decayed noble family. "I suppose you are much attached to your ancestral home ?"

"It is not my ancestral home. My father bought it with the farm."

I suppose I looked disappointed at the romance being spoiled, for the young man's face wore a sarcastic smile as he said : "We are not all counts and marquises now-a-days, though there are still enough, Heaven knows !"

"He belongs to a good old family, nevertheless," put in the priest, "who might have borne a title if they pleased. But Signor Rosignoli is a fierce democrat."

"He has names long enough for a Spanish hidalgo," I thought within myself. "What business has a lawyer to be called Julius Cæsar Rosignoli ?" And the young man said :

"What the good Padre calls a fierce democrat is a very moderate Liberal. I assure you I am not an Internationalist or a Nihilist. If you will do me the pleasure of calling as soon as you have settled on your lodging, I will show you a fine view from my tower."

He handed me his card, and I offered him mine, as I replied : "Most willingly."

"What an intelligent, charming young fellow that is," I said to the priest, when he was gone.

"Yes ; and he is very upright and honest, though somewhat extravagant in his ideas."

I did not pursue the subject, for I knew wherein they differed ; it was the everlasting question of Church property appropriated by the State. We drew up in the main street of the village near the restaurant, or inn. The priest took off his broad-brimmed hat, said he had the honour to salute me, and trotted off to the curate's house. I ordered dinner at the inn, but hesitated to engage the room, that looked into a dirty lane with high houses, and washings suspended from the upper floor windows. I conceived the bold idea of calling on the Syndic and enlisting his services.

The Syndic was an important magnate, who owned property and lived in a "palazzo ;" but he received me with great courtesy, asked what was my "revered name," and what my scope or object in remaining in San Severino, which seemed an unaccountable whim to him ; and, being satisfied on these points, he promised to make

inquiries about lodgings for me. When I came out from the presence of the magistrate I happened to meet my new friend Giulio Cesare, who carried me off to his castle.

II.

THERE were two enormous stone pillars at the entrance of a short avenue of cypresses, but the gate had disappeared. The avenue was trim and clean, and at either side of it were thickly planted and well-cared-for olives, figs, vines, mulberries and acacias, making a pleasant shade. The orchards were quite unprotected, yet the owner assured me that he had never been robbed. The building covered a large space of ground enclosing a square court, into which we passed under the great tower. The gate of this had also been removed, and opposite the open entrance was the stable, with a fresco over the door. The rest of the walls were washed a sober yellow brown, not out of keeping with the venerable aspect of the castle. There were no grasses or cobwebs or dust; everything was neat and orderly, and there was a great abundance of water. Two pumps close to the house, and in the garden a spring-well of such profundity and purity that the late owner, the father of Giulio Cesare, had built an imposing covering to it that looked like a gothic chapel.

"We have great respect for pure water; and this is, *proprio una galanteria*," said the master with a smile. "My poor tenants appreciate it."

In the courtyard my host opened a door to the left which led into a vast salon with lofty frescoed ceiling, furnished *alla antica*. One door out of this apartment opened into the bed-chamber of the master, which had still an inner room beyond it. Another door led to a little range of buildings which had been added on to the castle at a later period than that of its foundation; and here I was introduced to the dining-room and kitchen.

We sat down in the semi-twilight of the lofty salon, enjoying the delicious coolness secured by its thick, impenetrable walls. When my eyes got accustomed to the dimness, I looked round at the massive antique furniture and the pictures. Instead of ancestral portraits in velvet and lace ruffles, with pointed beards and wicked eyes, I met the familiar faces of modern men who had made Italy a nation.

"Victor Emmanuel, Cavour, La Marmora, Azeglio, Ricasoli, Farini," said Signor Rosignoli, presenting them in turn.

"And Garibaldi?" I asked.

"Here he is in the place of honour at the end of the room," he replied, opening a window to let in a little light. "And here," pointing to a large photograph framed in carved wood—"here is a foreigner who still must stand among those who have contributed to make Italy; to whom we owe a deep debt of gratitude. The greatest and noblest man in England—nay, in Europe."

I did not need to look at the picture to see whose it was ; I had so often heard Italians express themselves in the same terms. I felt a thrill of pride and pleasure, as is natural when one hears a great compatriot praised in a foreign land and a foreign tongue. But I did not show any pleasure.

"A very good likeness, and a handsome frame," I remarked. "Signore, you are a true type of the Nuova Italia ; the old narrow *family* pride is sunk in the new *national* pride. But do not they seem somewhat out of place—these modern heroes in this old fortress which belonged to the Age of the Despots ?"

"It belonged to a real despot—the Duke of Athens," he replied. "Out of place? No. We living men are dreadfully modern and common-place, are we not? Yet we surround ourselves with antique furniture, china and pictures—when we can afford them—undisturbed by the incongruity of our own presence among them. We enjoy the shelter of these ancient walls, whilst we dress, think and act like nineteenth-century men. Why should we hesitate, then, to put the greatest and best representatives of our age and country on those walls that we may look at them and draw inspiration from them? See here: I have on my book-shelves Shakespeare and Dante, Tennyson, Longfellow, Browning, Goethe and Schiller, with others of greater or less note, ancient and modern ; and I take some good out of them all. 'We're the heirs of all the ages !' Let us enjoy our inheritance freely."

"By all means," I returned, smiling at his animation, for he talked with his hands as well as his tongue, and seemed to have a lively interest in every subject discussed.

We now descended the steep, dark stone stairs to the vaults, preceded by the gardener with a torch and a bundle of keys. They were dark dungeons of vast extent, and the man held up the light to show the traditional trap-door where the victims of the tyrant's vengeance were dropped down to be mangled or spiked below. And then he led us to a corner, and removing a large flat stone, held the torch over an aperture in the earth, and requested me to look down. It was a deep hole heaped with human bones.

"Oh, those were glorious times ! the good old times !" said my host, continuing the subject of our previous conversation. "No wonder you English travellers love to dwell on them and study them ; and lament the picturesqueness, the romance, which are gone, never to return. There is no inspiring theme for poet or painter now-a-days. What are modern men, who sacrificed everything for the emancipation of their country, who were tender of human life, who respected their promises, compared with those glorious old tyrants with so many real skeletons in their cupboards ?"

"But see what marvellously gifted men flourished in those evil days," I said.

"And how were those gifted men treated ? Would the Florence of

to-day exile a Dante? Would modern Italy allow her Michael Angelo to be the slave of a succession of old popes? Would she permit a petty prince to shut up Tasso in a madhouse for seven years? Believe me, we have all that was good of the past in the immortal works of the men of genius, who were unappreciated by their age," returned my host.

We were now ascending to the tower, and at length reached the top, a large square terrace walled all round breast high, with loopholes. It commanded a magnificent view of a most pleasing landscape.

"What a contrast to the vaults!" I exclaimed.

In descending the narrow, steep stairs, we passed two rooms, one above the other, and entered the last, where some straw was stored. It was a square the full size of the tower, but had a closet off it which covered the landing below; the thick walls and deep windows made a delightful coolness and shade. A thought struck me.

"Signore, do you make no use of this room?"

"None but what you see."

"Will you let it to me, and I will furnish it in some manner for myself?"

"My dear sir, I should be most happy to have you for a tenant, but it is not habitable!"

"Never mind! I can live in any place, so it be clean. And this is a good room, a delightful, charming room."

The traditional Italian would have raised the rent on me, seeing my enthusiasm for the article which he thought worthless, but Julius Cæsar let me have it for what would be popularly described as "an old song."

I got a *contadina* to wash out my tower; I hunted up odds and ends of furniture; a stretcher bed with a mattress of Indian corn-leaves was supplied by my host, who would have added a wool mattress had I not firmly refused to use it, and linen, of which he had a great store, like all the Tuscan householders. I returned to town, put my trunk, bag and box of books on the diligence for San Severino, and then went to meet my new landlord, who drove me to the villa in his little trap, taking an hour less than the diligence.

A long country drive tête-a-tête is conducive to intimacy between two young men, and Giulio Cesare and I were mutually pleased with each other. He invited me to dine with him the first evening, and when we had smoked a cigar walking up and down the avenue, we passed into the salon. In the far end of this baronial apartment the young avvocato had modestly established himself and his immediate belongings. To light up the whole length of the hall would have been too expensive, so one end was in dusky twilight while the other had two lamps, one on the writing-table and the other on a handsome ebony cabinet. This end wall had three book-cases and there was a table under the middle one covered with books. I took up a volume

off the writing-table and found it to be Emerson's "Representative Men," opened at the essay on Shakespeare. We plunged into literature at once, and I learned that Rosignoli was studying Shakespeare, and was glad of a little help in understanding some difficult passages.

"How do you find so much time for reading when you have so many other occupations?" I asked, for I knew he worked hard at his profession, and equally so on the farm. The moment he unyoked his horse he took of his good clothes and donned a suit of coarse white linen and a straw hat, and put a hand to everything, like the *contadini*. But whether feeding cattle, or tending or watering his vineyard, or chopping wood, there was something in his refined, intelligent face, in the bearing of his well-knit sinewy figure, that bespoke the gentleman.

"How do I find time? I will tell you; by never losing an hour unnecessarily. I rise at five o'clock, and that enables me to get some hours more out of my day than those who sleep late. Those who go into society must keep late hours and sleep in the morning; consequently, I abandon society, and only cultivate a few intimate friends. Thus I have my evenings for myself. I keep my heavy reading in town, but while leading a pastoral life I recreate my soul with poetry."

He saw I was interested, and with an engaging frankness he continued.

"I am obliged to work, not having been born to a fortune. I had a sad youth with many trials. Among those I count the worst was the loss of my parents at an early age. My father bought this farm for me with a legacy that had been left him, but he did not make it pay because he was ignorant of agriculture; but I make it pay now. The house is divided into different quarters and let to poor families, for the most part; some of them work for me, and some have other occupations; but they are all decent, clean, honest folk, and attached to me. I supply them with pure water, cheap wine and vegetables, and they are very punctual in the payment of the rents. I like work for its own sake, and I am happy and content with my humble lot, never envying the owners of the princely villas around me. If I did not look after everything myself, and left all to a steward, as the gentlemen do, I should soon have nothing."

Signor Rosignoli escorted me upstairs to my lodging in the tower, carrying a lucerna to light me, and bade me a kindly good-night on the threshold. He had told me that I might, if I liked, make an arrangement to dine with him; but I, knowing how Italians prize the privacy of their home, did not accept this sacrifice. I decided to take my meals at the little restaurant and supplement them with tea and biscuits, which I was careful to bring with me; and I had fresh milk on the premises. My host was most kind and courteous, but we saw little of each other in the daytime. Generally, when I was returning from my dinner about seven o'clock, I met him

outside the house somewhere, smoking, and we took a walk, returning to finish the evening together in the salon, reading and expounding our respective languages to each other; and sometimes I went straight up to my room.

I was as happy as a prince in my tower. From my windows I surveyed the lovely landscape, the gently undulating hills and vales, covered with fine olives, chestnuts, vineyards, ripe corn, dotted with scarlet poppies, the deep blue sky, the crimson sunset and golden sunrise. I liked the San Severini, too; they were good, honest people, and religious. I often looked into the church, which was at our gate, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the evening, when service was going on, and I always found a devout congregation of simple peasants taking a genuine interest in the devotions. I attended on Sunday with my friend and found a large sprinkling of well-dressed persons from the villas around. Among these I observed the fair ladies of the diligence; and Giulio stayed to speak with them outside the church.

III.

A FEW days after my arrival in San Severino I was writing till after sunset, and though it was still bright out-of-doors the twilight invaded my chamber because of the smallness of the windows and the depth of the walls. It was hardly worth while to take my papers up to the terrace, where there was a stone table and bench; so I stood at the window making a desk of the broad sill, to finish a chapter. A page which I had pushed hastily from me fluttered out through the window; and it was easier to re-write it than descend those break-neck stairs to seek it. When I had finished my work for the day, I went up to the roof, where I often took the air before going to bed. I was walking up and down, watching a procession of Misericordia Brothers issuing forth from the church at the end of the avenue, with their flaming torches, when my host appeared.

"Amico," he said in his easy Italian fashion—he had begun to call me amico in three days—"are you not dreadfully lonely up here in this hermitage, like St. Simeon on the top of a tower?"

"No," I replied. "I have a few favourite authors with me, and I am absorbed in a little work that I am writing *con amore*, the subject being very *simpatico*. I don't know any English word that exactly corresponds with *simpatico*—do you?"

"Ah," he said, ignoring my question, "and you would not trust a friend with the secret? Well, I have accidentally discovered it. Listen!"

And he drew from his pocket the sheet that had flown out of the window, and read it aloud from beginning to end.

"Enough, enough!" I cried, laughing. "You have found me out—a Liberal in disguise. Do not inform on me, pray."

"Impostor!" said Giulioesare. "What was your motive for deceiving me?"

"Motive? Why, I hardly know, unless it was to rouse your enthusiasm; diversity of opinion gives a certain vivacity to conversation. I suppose you have come to give me notice to quit?"

The Italian of fiction would be bound to say, "Brother of my soul, welcome to my home and my heart." But this real Italian said nothing at all. We looked at each other with a smile and shook hands, and there was a tacit promise of friendship in that silent hand-clasp.

After this our intercourse was more free, and we dropped the Signore, calling each other by our baptismal names, Italian fashion.

The San Severini celebrated the fête of their patron saints of that name with great honours. Clergy had come from a distance to assist at the functions; special preparations had been made by the choir, and the church was draped inside and out with crimson and gold cloth. The owners of the villas had sent handsome offerings of flowers, and so also had Giulioesare, who paid every respect to the forms of religion while in the country, not to "disedify the population, or make a scandal." In the city he permitted himself more liberty; and laughed with me over the pretensions of San Severino.

On the day of the fête I was in the church leaning against a pillar, watching the moving crowd. The people were squeezing themselves into every nook and corner, standing and sitting on the steps of the side altars; and I became aware of a fair presence in a confession-box near me by the constant waving of an ivory fan. I soon perceived that the owner of the fan was the lady of the diligence, the Signora Madalena Buontalento; and standing beside her with her eyes bent on her prayer-book was her young cousin, Minerva Nerucci. I observed that Giulio often turned his eyes in the direction of the confession-box, and I was not surprised to find him talking to the ladies outside the church door when I came forth with the crowd.

The Signora Buontalento was very friendly to me, and said: "Won't you come over to the villa with your friend?"

"With the greatest pleasure, signora."

"I told Signor Giulio to bring you *sans ceremonie*, but he said you shunned society and lived as a hermit. How do you support the dulness of San Severino?"

"I think it charming, madame."

"Where is my Luisina?" asked the avvocato.

"She was very naughty, and I left her at home," returned mamma, smiling.

"Little darling!" said the young man. "I like her best when she is naughty."

"You would not if you had to manage her. Ask Minerva if she finds it easy to teach her or keep her in order."

We saw the ladies to their carriage, promising to walk over in the evening to their villa.

"Is the Signora Buontalento long a widow?" I inquired.

"More than two years. She was married fresh out of a convent at seventeen to a rich elderly merchant, who left her the *angeletto* you have seen. Her hand has been sought by several suitors."

"I am not surprised; she is pretty, good-natured, young, and, I suppose, rich."

"Yes; do you admire her?" asked my friend.

"Not particularly; I like her companion better," I replied, "though she is not so handsome."

"She has *very* little dot; in fact, is in rather a dependent position."

"That does not make her society less agreeable."

"No, that is true; but——"

Giulio paused.

"But what, my friend?"

"You will not take ill what I am going to say—what I have no right to say?" asked the *avvocato*.

"No, no; out with it."

"You are a foreigner, and our customs are somewhat different from yours. In England a certain amount of intimacy is permitted between young people, but here it is not considered *convenable* to show a decided preference for a girl unless with serious intentions."

"You have warned me in time," I said laughing. "I know your customs and had no mind to transgress them."

"Now you are 'a little angry—non è vero?" he said with an apologetic smile, and a winning gentleness of manner which would have disarmed me even if I had been angry, which I was not.

"Che, che!" and I put my arm through his, as we walked up and down the shady court smoking. "How delightful it is here after the hot, crowded church! It was what Madame would call a *murderous* heat."

We passed a pleasant evening at the villa of the ladies, for the most part out-of-doors. Another visitor dropped in; a country gentleman of about thirty-five years, large, powerful, handsome; whose conversation was chiefly about horses, dogs, and villas to let. He seemed to be paying court to the widow, and I attributed to jealousy a certain polite antagonism towards my friend.

That such an intelligent, charming fellow as Giulio could fall in love with such an empty, common-place person did not surprise me, as I see those incongruities too often to wonder at them much. Her florid beauty, her genial, happy temperament had no doubt attracted him; and probably the lady's fortune was not without its influence on the prudent young *avvocato*.

"I am as fond of that child as if she were mine," he said with reference to the little Luisina.

"Perhaps she will be yours some day," I thought. And I said: "I hope the child will get a good step-father, who will treat her kindly."

"I hope so; he would be a brute else. She is more beautiful than Leonardo da Vinci's angels."

On the following night there was to be a display of fireworks—still in honour of San Severino—and the ladies had been persuaded to promise to come with Signor Rossi, the gentleman already mentioned, to witness them from the top of the tower. Another neighbour, and his wife and daughter, were also invited to be of the party.

When the fireworks began to play, Signor Rossi offered to lift the child in his arms to see all that was going on; but she, with the caprice of a spoiled beauty, turned away, saying:

"No, not you; Signor Giulio," and held up her arms to him. The young man caught her up and kissed her, carrying her away to the side of the terrace where I was standing with the Signorina Minerva.

"You should not say rude things, Luisina. It was not kind to tell Signor Rossi that you would not let him lift you," said Minerva.

"Forgive her, Signorina mia; frankness is the privilege of her age; she will learn to dissemble her true sentiments time enough," said the avvocato.

"Do you not think it possible to be polite and true at the same time?" asked the girl.

"Quite so; but it requires a special education as well as natural tact to adjust the claims of truth and politeness impartially. Our dear Luisina is not yet up to the mark."

"I am up to the mark on the garden door," said Luisina complacently, in her lisping accents. We all laughed; Minerva's was a low, sweet, subdued laugh, very pleasant to hear, and more so because of its rarity. Giulio turned away, set the child down, and began a game of romps with her round the table and seats. I thought I observed by the blaze of the fireworks a confirmation of a suspicion I had entertained since I had seen Minerva in church and at the villa, that—

Her eyes on all his motions
With a mute observance hung.

I did not wonder that the girl was attracted by him. I found him charming, and could imagine him to be an irresistible lover. But whose lover was he? I fancied that of the Signora Madalena.

When we were about to descend the steep stairs of the tower, Giulio asked Rossi to carry the child; but that gentleman replied stiffly that she did not wish to be carried by him; whereupon the avvocato gave me the light and took the little one himself. We had some slight refreshments in the salon downstairs before the guests departed, but Signor Rossi tasted nothing, and talked little.

Two days after the fireworks, I was alone in my room, when my host appeared at the hour of the afternoon when he usually reposed.

"I thought you were asleep," I said, pushing a chair towards him. "What is the news?" He looked pale, and his eyes were very bright.

"Gerard, I want you to do me a little service."

"Willingly; tell me how?"

"I have arranged a 'partito d'onore' for to-morrow. The doctor will be my first sponsor, but I must have a second."

"'Partito d'onore?' You are not serious?"

"I am perfectly serious," he replied.

"Do you mean to say, Giulio, that you are really going to fight, or that you will go through the comedy of firing a shot over your adversary's shoulder, or giving him a slight scratch with a sword?"

"We mean real business, my friend. It is agreed that the combat is only to cease when one or the other is beyond the possibility of continuing it."

"And you invite me to assist at this as if it were a pic-nic! Is it allowable to ask the cause of the desperate resolve to slay or be slain?"

"Surely: Signor Rossi insulted me to-day in presence of the doctor and two other persons. A letter of his was sent from the post-office by mistake with mine. The names *Rossi* and *Rosignoli* are not very similar, but still such mistakes often occur. It happened that the said letter was imperfectly gummed, if at all, and he accuses me of having opened it. You see such an insult is insupportable. There is but one way of avenging it."

"You require the man's blood?"

"We must fight. I don't care whose blood is shed! It may be mine."

"If he retracted and apologised, you would be satisfied. Is it not so?"

"He would not do it. He has sought a pretext for a quarrel."

"Why?" I asked.

Giulio hesitated. "I may tell you in confidence that I believe he is a pretender to the hand of the Signora Madalena, and he thinks I am; but he is mistaken."

"I thought so myself," I said, much surprised by this confession. "But if it be all a mistake, it will be the more easy to accommodate the quarrel."

"Do you suppose I would explain such a matter unasked?" he said. "Never!"

"You would rather die—or else have a man's blood on your conscience all your life? To send a fellow creature out of the world, his soul full of evil passions, is too serious a deed to decide on hastily. Reflect, my friend. Late remorse cannot recall the dead: and as your wise d'Azeglio says somewhere: 'The reproaches of the dead are hard to bear.' You have not the strong temptation that he

has, for you are not jealous. It will count as an extenuating circumstance in his favour, and it will weigh against you at the bar of eternal justice."

"You will not be my second, then?"

"Frankly, Giulio, I will not, for I think duelling a brutal and barbarous practice, worthy of the past ages which you so much despise."

"I may as well confess, Gerard, that I agree with you in everything that you have said," returned Giulio.

"Allora!" I cried, seizing his hands and looking into his face.

"I must fight," he replied, with a melancholy resolve. "I am sorry for the absurd prejudice—a relic of barbarism, which still prevails in our beloved Italy. But I must yield to it, else, there would be a slur on my honour; both men and women would despise me. I am sorry; for life had begun to open with happy promises for the future."

His voice took a tone of tender sadness, and a softer light came into his eyes.

"If there is someone in the world who is still dear to you, who is worthy of your affection—Giulio, my friend, let the thought of that person stand between you and crime—or death!"

He shook his head sadly, hopelessly.

"You are a coward!" I cried, letting go his hands and turning away.

"How?"

"Yes! I have called you a coward, and I will give you no satisfaction. You cannot dare to face the sneers of the thoughtless, vulgar herd, the idle, worthless, ignorant men of the clubs and cafés; but you dare to commit a crime which your conscience loudly condemns. Go! You are a coward, I say."

I turned away and walked to the window, and immediately I heard the door shut. He was gone.

Giulio was the most lovable man I had ever known. I had become much attached to him, and I was deeply grieved and disturbed. I pondered on various schemes of frustrating the meeting, and at last thought of appealing to the Signora Madalena Buontalento, which seemed the only chance. It was surely her business to prevent two men killing each other because of her.

I took my hat and set forth at once. When I reached the villa I asked to see the mistress of the house, who received me with her usual cordial, gracious manner. The Signorina was in the room, and I asked for a moment's private conversation on urgent business. Minerva rose at once, but the Signora laid her hand on hers and hindered her, saying to me: "You may speak, Signore. I have no secrets from my cousin."

"There is no reason why I should conceal it from the Signorina," I replied. "It has come to my knowledge that there is going to be a duel between the Signor Giulio Cesare and Signor Rossi. This

'partito d' onore,' as they call it, is arranged for to-morrow morning ; and it seems it is to be a serious affair—not a diversion."

The bright colour faded from the lady's face. I looked at the young girl who was sitting with her work in her lap and her pretty hands folded on it. She, too, had grown pale, and her brown eyes were fixed on me with a startled expression.

"You see, Signora, I can do nothing : I am a stranger and a man, and no one would listen to me. But ladies have a powerful influence if they choose to use it ; and I dared to hope—as both these gentlemen are your friends—that you would be so good as to interfere. You will know how better than I should."

"Do you know the cause of the quarrel ?" asked the lady, with a troubled look.

"The ostensible cause, yes ; Signor Rossi says that Signor Rosignoli opened a letter of his."

"What a shame !" cried Minerva, blushing to the brow.

The Signora remained silent and thoughtful, leaning her cheek on her plump white hand sparkling with jewels, her large blue eyes full of trouble.

"Pray advise me what to do," she said at length. "I am so taken by surprise that the little wits I have are confused."

"The offender is Signor Rossi, and he is also the elder ; suppose you summon him to your presence and remonstrate with him."

She agreed to do this, and went at once to write a note to be sent to the gentleman's house. The young lady glanced at me once or twice, and at last said : "Cannot *you* do something to prevent this meeting, Signore ?"

"Signorina, tell me what : I shall be only too happy to obey your commands," I replied.

"You are Signor Giulio's friend."

"Yes, I love him well, and I have already pushed my remonstrances to the point of breaking our friendship."

"He is so bent on fighting ?"

"He says he must ; that both men and women would despise him if he did not."

She sighed audibly, took up her work and plied the needle with trembling fingers. I had nothing to say to soothe the distress which she was unwilling that I should see ; so the moment the Signora returned I took my leave.

As I was coming home from a walk in the evening I found a young man, a notary of San Severino, standing at the foot of my stairs, just outside the salon of the Signor Giulio. He accosted me and asked me if I had any objection to witness a will.

"Whose will ?" I asked.

"Signor Rosignoli's. Four male witnesses are necessary, and we want one."

I followed him, and walked up the long, gloomy hall. At the far

end of it, seated at his writing-table with his steward and another man standing near, was the young master of the house. Letters were burning in the grate, and there was a general air of confusion around. When he saw me emerging into the light of his solitary lamp, he rose with the politeness that never failed, and said: "Signor Gerard, I did not mean them to trouble you; but since you are here, perhaps you will not object to witness my will?"

I said I had no objection. The notary then read the testament aloud. With the exception of some trifling personal belongings and a few books left to persons named, the Signorina Minerva Nerucci was to inherit all his property. The testator put his signature to the document and handed the pen to me. I signed; the others did likewise; and wishing the *padrone felice notte*—which must have sounded a hollow mockery to him—they departed.

I was following the steward out of the room, but I turned to take another look at Giulio. There was something indescribably pathetic in the figure of the lonely young man standing there, making preparations for his own death and funeral while in the full vigour of health, with a happy life before him. I saw in his eye a mournful look that went to my heart. I walked back to him and said:

"Giulio, I beg your pardon for my rudeness this afternoon. If I loved you less, I should have been more polite." And I offered my hand.

"I know you are sorry for me, Gerard," he said, pressing my hand warmly. "I am sorry for myself. Life was becoming pleasant to me, for I was content with my lot, and I had become attached to my humble home here." He looked round at his heroes on the walls. "I was happy in the thought that it would soon be made bright by the presence of my beloved. My will has revealed my secret to you. I love Minerva, and I am going to be killed for Madalena!"

"That is hard indeed," I replied. "To die for one's love has a sort of consolation in it; but to die for another! And will it not look like disloyalty to her?"

"I have never spoken; but I leave a sealed letter, which will reveal the truth to her when I am gone—if *I should fall*; and of that there is little doubt, for *I* will not kill my adversary."

"Giulio, is there no way out of it?"

"If you were Italian, you would know there is none. Addio! But, stay, Gerard: I want you to have a little *recordo* of me." He took an antique seal off his chain and gave it me; and then, laying his two hands on my shoulders with a winning grace and tenderness, which would have softened a harder heart than mine, he said: "*Amico mio!* you will not forget me?"

"No, Giulio, no!" I replied, with emotion. "May God preserve and bless you!" I clasped the warm, living hand, and thought the morrow's sun might find it cold and pulseless. "If this is likely to be our last meeting on earth, may I not stay a little to bear you company?"

"I have to set my house in order," he said. "Thanks, dear friend, but you must leave me."

I was up at the dawn, watching for Giulio from my tower, and I followed him at a little distance to the village. He stopped at the doctor's house, and soon came forth with him and another man. They took the road to the Villa Buontalento, and within half-a-mile of it they turned into the wood. I now guessed that the meeting was to be in the glade by a little brook, because it was a very retired spot, with a sufficiently open space for the contest.

I did not follow them, but ran to the villa and asked to see the ladies. Minerva came down first, in a cream-coloured morning wrapper, fastened with a crimson bow at the neck. She looked as if she had not slept, and asked eagerly what news I had.

"They are gone to the ground. Has Madame failed?"

"The messenger left the note, for Rossi was not at home. He has not called, and I fear he is bent on carrying out his ends."

"Call Madame, and come both of you to the ground."

Madalena soon appeared, and Minerva, taking a garden hat from a peg in the hall, stepped out on the lawn, holding up her long gown from the dewy grass, which soon wet her little bronze slippers.

It is curious how well I remember noticing those trivial things, notwithstanding the state of excitement I was in. Instead of waiting for the pony carriage, we rushed across the grounds, taking a short cut to the brook. As we approached the glade we beheld through the trees a group of men looking on at the contest, which had already begun. The antagonists were parrying, advancing, retreating, with rapid motions which the eye could not follow at a distance.

We quickened our pace, the ladies gasping with nervous excitement.

"You must call on them to stop, and rush in between them, Signora," I said.

"Must I? Oh, Madonna Santissima, aid me!" cried the poor lady, and she ran forward, followed by her cousin.

"Hold, gentlemen! Hold, for the love of Heaven!" she cried, at the moment when Rossi sheathed the point of his blade in Giulio's breast, and drew it forth stained with a crimson dye. He stood upright a moment, and turned his eyes on Madalena, as she threw up her arms and screamed, "Mio Dio!" and then on Minerva, who stood still, an image of stony despair. As he was sinking to the ground, I caught him in my arms and laid him gently down, resting his head on my knee. The surgeon cut open his clothes from neck to shoulder and applied his medicaments to staunch the blood, which flowed profusely from a deep, slanting cut in the chest. Before he had finished, Giulio's already pallid face had become a death-like white, and his eyelids closed.

"Is he dead?" asked someone, in a tone of deep anxiety and distress. It was his rival, whose hand had dealt the blow.

"Dead!" echoed Madalena, in an hysterical voice. "Is it you who ask? And have you the courage to stand there and look at your handiwork? Away, assassin!" She waved her hand and turned from him with a look of horror. He cowed beneath the lovely woman's scorn, and moved back a pace or two behind the seconds.

At the fatal word "*Morto*," Minerva sank on her knees beside me with a heart-broken sob. For the first time she dared to speak her lover's name. Laying her hand on his, she cried "Giulio!" in a tone of such anguish that it helped to recall his consciousness. He opened his eyes and the first word he breathed was "Minerva!" accompanied by a look of inexpressible love and sorrow mingled. She answered but with her tears, which fell like rain upon his hand.

"Where is Rossi?" asked the wounded man, and Rossi hastened to his side. Giulio, still holding Minerva's hand clasped in his left, extended his right to his adversary.

"It was all a mistake," he said, with a faint, pale smile.

"I wish to heaven you had said so yesterday," replied Rossi, remorsefully.

"True, most true. Ah, Gerard, my friend, you were right; I was a coward, a miserable coward. If I die I have my deserts." This elicited a fresh burst of grief from Minerva. "Do not weep, dearest; I am not worth those precious tears of thine. I do not want to die; I would fain live for thee, my angel!"

"You are not going to die—not a bit of it," said the doctor, in a cheerful, business-like manner. "It is a bad wound, but I judge it curable within twenty days. Come, gentlemen; we must make a litter of this mantle, and bring him to the villa as quickly as possible."

Rossi was one of the persons who carried the patient to the house, where he was laid in the guest chamber and tended with the greatest care. The doctor was right. Giulio did not die. Having conducted themselves, as the seconds declared, like "perfect cavaliers," according to the code, there was nothing to hinder Giulio and Rossi being very good friends henceforth. But the Signora Madalena could hardly forgive her admirer for the part he played in what was very near being a fatal tragedy. It is just possible that she felt a warmer interest in Giulio than in Rossi; but in time her heart may soften to her faithful knight, whose fault was caused by love of her.

After having assisted at the making of Giulio's will, and such like lugubrious preparations for his death, I had the pleasure of witnessing the happy ceremony of his marriage with the Signorina Minerva Nerucci, he having voluntarily given her a solemn pledge that he would never fight a duel again before he asked that other promise from her which was to make them one.

G. S. GODKIN.

MY FRIEND'S WIFE.

BY C. HADDON CHAMBERS.

I WISH, before relating this story, to anticipate the natural inquiries which I imagine will follow the reader's perusal of it. Thus: 1. Is the story true? Yes, I believe it is, as it was told to me by a friend whose word I have every reason to respect and believe, and who was, himself, one of the *dramatis personæ* of the short history. 2. Do I believe in spiritualism? No; for the simple reason that I know nothing whatever about it, never having had, I must confess, either the energy or the curiosity to devote myself to a proper study of the subject. I was never at a *séance* in my life, and no spirits or invisible beings have ever rapped mysterious messages to me in my solitude. So now to my story; or to be accurate and just, to the story of my friend, Mr. Wainton.

We had, through tortuous conversational windings, got on to the subject of spiritualism one evening, when my friend signified that apropos to that subject he had a tale to unfold. Accordingly I made myself comfortable in an easy chair, lighted a fresh cigar, and remained expectantly silent while he began the following.

You must know that when I had fairly entered my twenties, spiritualism, as it is called, was the talk of the day, and spirit-rapping was, with a great many people, the favourite amusement of the hour. I, being of an inquisitive and somewhat superstitious disposition, was bitten by the general craze, and very badly bitten I assure you. I neglected all other amusements for the peculiarly exciting one of spirit-rapping, and as in my small circle of friends there were several who shared my enthusiasm, I had every opportunity of gratifying the singular taste.

Among those friends it is only necessary for me to mention three—George Hargraves, his wife Grace, and her sister, Janet Carr. George was then my most intimate friend, as he would probably have remained to this day but that the decrees of fate took him to India to reside several years since, and few friendships can bear the test of such a wide and lengthy separation. Prolonged pen-and-ink intimacies are rare, as you have doubtless experienced; and as my active friendship with George is now a matter purely of retrospect, I am justified in speaking of it and him in the past tense.

No three people could have been more unlike than those I have named. Hargraves was somewhat indolent and slightly superstitious, but of rather a sluggish intellect, and not of very refined sensibilities. Although unconsciously regardless of the feelings of others, however, he was frank and generous, and he was possessed of a strong vein of

humour. He cultivated the spirits, to use his own irreverent expression, 'for the fun of the thing.'

Miss Carr, my friend's sister-in-law, was a little, thin woman, rather pretty, with bright, restless eyes, and sharp features—not excepting that unseen but important member, the tongue. She was deeply read for a young woman, and decidedly clever; and to tell the truth, I was a little afraid of her, as one is apt to be of clever women. She regularly joined in our communings with the spirit-world in a business-like manner, and with what a contemporary statesman would call an 'open and inquiring mind.' She professed to be an earnest seeker after truth: particularly, I could not help suspecting, the truth about other people.

Mrs. Hargraves was so unlike her sister in every respect, as to almost incline one to doubt the relationship. In person she was taller and much more beautiful. Her features were very delicately moulded; her hair was of that light brown shade which is almost golden in the sunlight; her complexion was clear to transparency; her form was very frail, and her eyes, which I purposely mention last because I remember them best, were large and grey and heavily fringed with dark lashes. The eyelids had a way of drooping suddenly, in a manner which told eloquently of an exceedingly timid and retiring nature. You looked at Grace Hargraves and thought of a water-lily.

For the rest she was the most highly-strung woman I have ever met. In her, sensibility had life and motion. Her nervousness was almost painful, until you knew her well and had gained her confidence. Then you found her to be a very charming woman, of a strangely poetic imagination. For my part, I very much preferred Grace—as I, being an intimate friend, was privileged to call her—to her clever sister.

Hargraves, as you will readily imagine from what I have told you, did not quite understand his wife, although he was undoubtedly devotedly attached to her. The comparative coarseness of his nature did not fit in very well with the exquisite refinement of hers; but she gave no sign that it was so, and I believe that their married life was altogether happy.

It is scarcely necessary for me to tell you that Grace took no active part in our favourite pastime. She had not her sister's inquisitiveness. And I think, too, that, holding as she did very orthodox views, she regarded the whole business as savouring of impiety; more especially as our devotions—if I may so call them for want of a better word—were attended with more amusement than solemnity. But apart altogether from these considerations, her nerves were really much too delicately strung to admit of so severe a strain.

Accordingly, when the lights were turned down, and we who courted the spirit revelations gathered round the table, Grace always retired into the next room—which communicated with the one we

occupied by folding doors—and passed the time with a book, or more generally at the piano. She played very beautifully. She loved music. Her talent had been highly cultivated, and coupled with these advantages she had the most marvellous gift of expression I have ever met with in a non-professional woman. The intense feeling of which she was made up seemed to pass from her finger tips and endue the instrument with a noble, poetic life.

Naturally enough, we liked Grace to play during our *séances*. It added a fresh charm to the mystic hour, and she was always willing to indulge us. While we communed with the spirits, the old masters' most dreamy and suggestive compositions were eloquently interpreted within our hearing; but not infrequently the horrible incongruity occurred of one of Beethoven's sonatas, or one of Mendelssohn's songs without words, being drowned in the laughter occasioned by an unexpected sentiment on the part of some lively spirit.

One evening—a memorable evening—our party at the table consisted of five, including Hargraves, Miss Carr and myself. The spirits were in a phenomenally merry mood. Absurd joke after joke was perpetrated against each member of the party, and our laughter at last became so loud and frequent that Grace suddenly closed the piano, and declared from the next room that she would sacrifice music and herself on the altar of good nature no longer.

"Then come and join us, my dear," cried Hargraves, who was in the highest spirits.

"No, thank you," we heard her reply.

"Well, just come to the door for one moment," implored her husband. "I want to speak to you."

She appeared at the door immediately, and stood looking into the dim-lighted room.

"What is it, George?"

"Do join us, Grace—only for a little while; and if you don't like it you can leave us again."

"Please don't ask me," replied Grace, evidently troubled that she felt obliged to refuse a request from her husband.

"You have no idea what you are missing, Mrs. Hargraves," remarked an enthusiastic lady next to me.

"I don't wish for an idea," was the reply.

"Indeed, Grace, it is very foolish of you to isolate yourself," said her sister. "You not only lose considerable entertainment, but much profitable instruction. What is life without the pleasures and profits of investigation?"

"I don't envy you either the pleasure or the profit, Janet, and you should know by this time that I am not equal to a share in what you call investigation."

"I shouldn't urge her, George," I whispered to my friend; "I really don't think her nerves are equal to it. Remember the widow

who fainted the other night when the presence of her late husband's shade was announced."

"Nonsense!" replied George, among whose small faults obstinacy was conspicuous. "People are nervous because they nurse and coddle their nerves; and, thank heaven, Grace has no defunct husband to fear a visitation from. The only way to dispel her nervousness is to show her how harmless the whole thing is. Grace, do come. The spirits are jovial to-night, and you will be amused."

Then, as she hesitated painfully—her love and obliging, compliant nature at war with her prejudices and fears—he added: "Only this once, dear, to please me."

Then she came, as I feared she would if he pressed the point; and feeling more vexation than I quite understood, I made room for her between Janet and myself. As she laid her hand upon the table, I was conscious that she trembled, and I was sorely tempted to make some excuse for breaking up the meeting. Would I had done so!

"That's very good of you," said Hargraves, pleased to have secured his own way, "and in a few minutes you will be glad you have come, and sorry you have stayed away so long. Now understand, I am asking the questions in French—a language we all know pretty well—and I obtain answers in the same language by repeating aloud the alphabet, a rap being heard when I come to a letter required in the composition of the spirit's answer. Now, let us proceed."

Then, after a pause, he put this question to our invisible companions: "Have you any particular communication to make?"

The answer to Hargraves' question came promptly in three raps, which signified an affirmative.

"Is the communication you desire to make to be addressed to one of us particularly?"

The answer was again yes; and while the lady on my left tittered audibly in anticipation of another jest, I felt that Grace, who was on my right, trembled more violently than before.

"Will you please intimate to which of us you refer?"

The answer this time was strangely expressed, but in a manner we were all familiar with. The table on which our hands rested, and which was small, and oval in shape, slowly tipped up, and one end of it, at which Grace was seated, declined almost into her lap.

I had, strangely enough, confidently expected this result; but I was none the less annoyed when it came. I believe we all expected that Grace would start up in agitation and leave the room; but she did not. She sat still and silent, without even withdrawing her hands from the table. I tried to see her face, but it was impossible to read its expression in the darkness. I felt sure, though, that she was colourless.

"We needn't go any further, George," I said. "I'm sure Grace can't stand it."

"Oh, do let's go on," cried the lady on my left; "it's sure to be something funny."—And thereupon I hated her.

"Go on," said Grace, in a low voice.

I suppose that it is not in human nature to deliberately refuse hearing something about oneself, and so, for the moment, Grace's curiosity conquered her nervousness.

Then George proceeded to elicit the communication by the means I have described. These were the letters at which the rap arrested him—

LA MORT.

The effect upon me, when the T completed the words, I shall never forget. It fell like an iron bolt upon my heart. Those fateful words to be directed against the youngest and fairest of our party! It was too horrible. I was by no means a "true believer," but I defy anyone, under the circumstances, not to have felt impressed as I did.

For many moments we all sat chilled into silence, and then Hargraves burst into a laugh—not a natural laugh, but a discordant, affected one.

"What a very bad joke," he said, with a sorry attempt to speak lightly; "and what an old one. Pity they couldn't tell us something we didn't know before. Of course we shall all die some day. They insist upon that, because they've experienced the sensation themselves, I suppose."

Then, to my intense surprise, Grace said, with apparent calmness: "Ask them when, George."

I have often asked myself since, whether my friend was right in continuing that scene, and, the answer being no, I have condemned myself for not insisting upon closing it. But Hargraves probably argued, as I did, that opposing Grace's wishes would only result in leaving a deeper impression upon her mind; and we were, doubtless, both animated by the thought that the prophecy was in keeping with the lively view of humour in which the spirits had comported themselves during the evening.

George obeyed his wife, seeking the required information in tones of assumed levity and indifference. By the method he employed, some time was occupied in eliciting a reply, during which the tension upon the feelings of each of us—judging by myself—must have been painfully intense.

"*Within one year!*" was the substance of the spirits' reply.

When this second blighting message was delivered, another silence fell upon us, which I hastened to break by forcing a laugh. George, awakened from the stupor into which he appeared to have fallen, followed my example. Janet said, "absurd," with contemptuous incredulity; and the lady I have before mentioned, like the foolish creature she was, maladroitly burst into tears, and left the room. Grace alone of us all remained silent, and outwardly unaffected.

"The spirits are too odious to be endured now," remarked Har-

graves, rising from the table. "I do believe, Grace, that they are trying to revenge themselves on you for having neglected them so long. Let us go to the next room, dear, and have some music."

It was only when I saw her in the light of the other room that I realised how deeply she had been affected. Her face was perfectly white, and her eyes, instead of drooping, as was their wont when met, looked straight at one with a strange, *unseeing* expression.

She sat at the piano, and resumed the piece she had been playing when our laughter had interrupted her. It was Beethoven's "Adieu," commonly supposed to be the great master's last composition. It is, as you are doubtless aware, a composition full of beauty and divine simplicity, but so intensely melancholy that I would rather she had played anything else just then. But, ah! how beautifully she played it. So softly, lingeringly and regretfully, that when the noble theme died slowly away upon the piano, it long left its mournful echo in my memory, and kept alive melancholy in my heart.

When she left the piano, I rose to go.

"Good-night, Grace; good-night, George. And, by-the-bye," I added in her hearing, "since the spirits have taken to making bad jokes, I think we had better cut their acquaintance."

"I quite agree with you," he replied.

Then, as he came with me to the hall door, I hinted my opinion that Grace needed change of air, and on that point he also agreed with me.

For several months after that night I saw nothing of the Hargraves'. George and his wife went to Scotland, where they had numerous relations, and shortly after their departure business suddenly called me to America, where I remained for nearly six months. During that uncertain period for both of us (George, I afterwards learned, was still moving about among his Northern relatives), it is not strange that no correspondence passed between us. I had by no means forgotten my friends, although the circumstances which attended our last meeting were dim in my memory. Altogether, ten months passed before we again met.

On the afternoon of the day on which I again found myself in London, I met Hargraves face to face as I was coming out of a bank in the City.

We were both delighted at the meeting. I told him that I had intended calling at his house in the evening in the hope that he had returned to town.

Then as we walked arm-in-arm westward I asked after Grace.

"I am sorry to say," he replied, "that Grace has been ailing for some time—quite three months."

Distressed to hear such bad news, I inquired the cause of her illness, noticing at the same time how worn and troubled my friend was looking.

"Her illness puzzles me," said Hargraves; "and no wonder, since

it puzzles all the doctors. She appears to be consumed with an inward fever, and her nervousness, which you will remember well, has so increased as to be now painful to witness. She has no appetite; nothing seems to interest or rouse her; and her weakness is such that she is at present unable to leave her room. The greatest physician in England saw her, and spoke of nervous depression. He recommended tonics and a change of air and scene; but as we had been moving about the country for months, the last piece of advice was valueless. You can judge of my anxiety."

I was silent. While he had been speaking, the recollection of that night ten months ago suddenly came to me with startling vividness.

"What to do next I don't know," pursued Hargraves. "I wish, if you are not engaged this afternoon, you would come home with me and see Grace. The sight of such an old friend might do her good."

I gladly assented, and he called a cab.

As we drove to his house I remarked:

"Do you think it possible that Grace may have something weighing upon her mind?"

He turned quickly as I spoke.

"Only to-day, for the first time, has such a thought entered my mind, and it has filled me with trouble. I had completely forgotten what occurred when we last met—when I was wicked, cruel, mad enough to urge her into joining in our spirit mummery. May God forgive me, though I can never forgive myself."

"I, too, had almost forgotten it," I said.

"But has she?" he exclaimed vehemently. "Has she? That is the question that is torturing me now. You know how terribly imaginative she is. I must find out by some means if that horrible prophecy is still in her mind, and if so, I must make a clean breast of it to the doctors."

Just then we arrived at the house. George led the way upstairs, and on the first landing we met Janet Carr.

"How is Grace?" asked George, impatiently, as we stopped to shake hands.

"I'm afraid she is no better," replied Janet, seriously. "I have been reading to her, but she did not seem able to settle her thoughts to listen."

At the door of the sick-room Hargraves by a gesture bade me wait for a moment. Then he entered alone.

"Grace, love," I heard him say, "I have brought an old friend with me. Are you well enough to see him?"

The reply was spoken too weakly for me to catch its sense; but in a few moments my friend stepped softly to the door and beckoned me within.

Grace was in bed, half sitting up by the support of a number of pillows, an Indian shawl thrown round her shoulders. I was inexpressibly shocked—prepared though I was—by the change in her

appearance. The flesh had fallen away from her face. Her paleness, which was as that of death, was only rendered more startling by the spot of vivid colour on either cheek. Her eyes, which were preternaturally bright, and inclined to wander, seemed to start from their deep, dark, hollow setting.

Directly I saw her I felt convinced that our suspicions of the cause of her illness were only too well founded; and by the strange look that crossed her face I became conscious, too, that the presence of me, of all people—connected as I was with that memorable evening—was the least likely to benefit her. Accordingly, I determined not to remain longer than a few moments.

"Grace, this won't do at all," I said, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "This is not the reunion that I dreamed of in the months I spent across the Atlantic."

"I'm glad you've come back," she murmured faintly, stretching out a weak, thin hand.

"And now that I'm here," I continued, "I shall expect you, as a personal favour to me, to get well and strong again."

"Indeed, he deserves a jollier welcome than this, dear!" remarked Hargraves. "You may be sure that he will not be content until he sees you downstairs sitting at the piano as of old."

I left the bed, and was about to take George aside to whisper that I had better not stay, when we were arrested by a slight exclamation from Grace. Turning quickly, we saw that she had risen upon her elbow, and that, with her face towards the door, she was bending eagerly forward.

Hargraves hurried to her side.

"What is it, darling?" he asked, with tender anxiety.

She made no reply.

"Grace—dear love—what is it?"

"Listen!" she whispered.

We both listened, but heard nothing.

"What is it you hear, dear?" And, leaning against the bed, he wound his arm round her.

"'The Adieu,'" she murmured. "Beethoven's 'Adieu.' You remember? Listen!"

George threw a look of intense anguish at me, as we again bent our heads to listen. He heard nothing—but this time I did. I distinctly heard the melancholy strains of "L'Adieu," as if the music were being played softly and tenderly on the piano, as if Grace herself had played it.

I say I heard distinctly; but actual music there was none. It was the intensity of the *seeming* to hear that made me hear. The music was made audible to me by the force of a highly-wrought imagination—the same force which brought Grace Hargraves her death.

For when I looked up she was lying back in her husband's arms—and life had fled.

THE BLACK VALLEY.

By WILLIAM FRANCIS AINSWORTH, F.S.A.

IT has been my fate to be a good deal knocked about in the world. I have been cast upon boundless steppes and apparently limitless wildernesses and deserts, but none of them have left such an impression upon me of utter repulsiveness as the "Black Valley."

In the first, the sense of loneliness and monotony has been relieved by the green carpeting of the soil; in the second, a few shrubs and other scattered vegetation have helped to cheer the otherwise parched and sandy expanse.

But in the "Black Valley" there was no vegetation whatsoever. I was travelling at the time on a sorry steed, accompanied by a young and faithful servant—a Mussulman, Abd-allah by name—as he was in reality a true servant of God; and by a native muleteer who had charge of an additional horse, carrying saddle-bags of portentous dimensions.

We were crossing a rugged chain of mountains—what there was of a scarcely distinguishable road—encumbered with rocks and boulders, and evening was fast approaching, when the "Black Valley" presented itself to view.

The said valley was some seven or eight miles in width, and bounded to the north by another chain of mountains (we were coming from the south). It narrowed to the east, till, some ten miles off, it seemed to be hill-enclosed. In the centre was a dark-looking, sluggish stream, known as the Kara Su, or Black-water, and this flowed to the west along an open plain which extended beyond the reach of vision.

"Well," I said, turning to the muleteer, "this is not a very pretty valley."

"Kara Wady," replied the muleteer. "The curse of God is upon it. But there is a bridge, Kara Jisr (the black bridge), and beyond it is a village with a serai."

"A kirwan-serai (caravansary)," I interposed, smilingly, "that is what you mean. There can be no serai (palace) in such a place as this."

"It is so, though, sir," responded the muleteer, "and it is the residence of a sheikh of noble descent who has not the best repute, as he levies toll upon all who pass the bridge, and he is head of all the country round. His place is known as Kara Serai (Black Palace)."

"Everything is kara here," I interjected. "We are now on the Kara Tagh (Black Mountain), before us is the Kara Wady, and yonder," pointing to some objects barely discernible in the distance,

"is the Kara Jisr and Kara Seraï.* Well, we have no alternative but to try and reach the latter before it is dark."

The sun was, indeed, already low in the horizon. Its last rays lingered on the distant hills and mountains in the east with a lurid redness that contrasted strangely with the slough of despond before us. There was, as I have before said, no vegetation either on the slope of the mountains or on the plain beyond.

The soil was at first tenacious and of an ashen-grey colour, cracked and fissured by the sun, but as we advanced it became darker and muddy. The road, such as it was, soon became slimy, and progress was slow and difficult. The splashing of the horses disturbed occasionally snakes of gigantic dimensions with great triangular heads and massive jaws of most forbidding promise. But they wriggled themselves away as best they could into the mud.

We could now see that the Kara Seraï stood upon a lofty mound, also known as Kara Teppeh or "Black Mound," and beyond it were mounds of a lesser degree, upon which were also a few stray buildings. Indeed, as we afterwards learned, this valley of black ooze and mud was flooded in the rainy season and the teppehs and buildings on them were left like islands on a lake.

Crossing a well-built bridge which carried us over a river of ink—black as Erebus or the Styx itself, and which, in this case, more than vindicated its name—we ascended the slopes of the mound just as darkness was impending, and out of it came gradually the figures of two men leaning listlessly against the walls of black adobe, or mud dried in the sun. One was an elderly man, evidently the owner of the seraï; the other, a companion or attendant. Both, however, were stalwart, daring-looking fellows.

To the usual formula of "*salaam alaikum*" the response of "*alaikum salaam*" was returned in sullen tones.

"What angel of evil sends you here? We have got the plague!"

"Oh," I replied, "I suppose you have that always." Then, turning to the muleteer: "How far is it to the next village?" I inquired.

"Ten long hours, over the next range of mountains."

"Then there is no help for it. I suppose the plague is not in the seraï," I said, jumping off my horse, and leading the way, followed by the Sheikh and his acolyte, who had together long been watching our laborious approach, as also by my faithful Abd-allah, whilst the horses were left to be provided for by the sagacious muleteer.

The guest-room of the seraï was a lofty, spacious apartment, but with a very ruinous aspect. On one side were some worn-out cushions, intended to represent a divan; and, on the other, an

* The word "Kara" is used in many senses. In its simple meaning, it means black, as in *kara-kalpak* or "black caps." Applied to a mountain or river, it means dark or gloomy, but applied to an edifice or ancient site, it means ruinous. Applied to individuals, it has a variety of meanings.

indescribable assemblage of rotting saddles, broken bridles, rusty arms and tasselled accoutrements cast in disorder—relics of bygone predatory exploits—that had been now abandoned.

I shuddered involuntarily at the aspect of things. It was but too evident that we were in a den of thieves. But determined to put the best face upon matters, I attempted some light conversation.

"You have a bad road here," I ventured to remark. "Not many travellers, I suppose?" This to the Sheikh, who had taken his place at the head of the divan, and had, with his only follower, assumed the inevitable chibouk.

"It is not a beautiful road," he replied, in anything but sympathetic tones, "but it is the only one in the country, and thanks to the munificence of the great Sultan Selim—blessed be his memory—the river has a bridge over it; and, thanks to my ancestors, I have a seraï wherein to receive toll from travellers. It is a legacy bequeathed by the blessed Sultan to the family."

"Oh!" I said, fully appreciating the meaning of the noble sheikh. "But how do you live here? You have neither cattle, nor goats, nor fowls, and neither garden nor cultivation. No food for either man or beast!"

"We send to market once a month for rice, burghul (maize and wheat), coffee and tobacco. We want nothing more. As to the horses, they can eat burghul. But we have a market here twice a year—a bazaar—hundreds of people," and the old Sheikh's eyes brightened up as he proceeded. "We have tom-toms and village maidens. Ah! you should see Kara Seraï then!"

"Thanks! You are not even now alone here. You have neighbours." It is not etiquette to ask if there was a harem in the ruin beyond.

"Yes, plenty, but they are all robbers. They exact the tolls and the backshishes that are due to me only as the Sheikh; but they are of no use now. They are laid up with the black-fever."

"Confound the word," I inwardly groaned; "everything is black here."

"Are there any black fish in the river?" I wickedly propounded.

"Yes, plenty; but they are not good for the stomach."

No wonder, I thought; yet the Roman epicureans delighted in the black fish of the Orient. We were here interrupted by Abd-allah coming in with the saddle-bags.

"Master will have to open a tin," said the youth cheerfully. "I have got the women to pick some rice, but it is black, and Allah knows when it will be ready."

"Black again," I muttered. "Well, Abd-allah, you can light me a pipe, and then get whatever is handy out of the bags for a feed. am told there is a bazaar here."

Abd-allah laughed. "There are two or three posts and a few broken planks down in the hollow, between this teppeh and the

next," he replied, "but everything alike is desolate and ruinous here."

"Kara! Kara!" he exclaimed, lifting his hands to heaven. "The light of the Prophet has never gleamed upon this place."

"You do us a gross injustice!" angrily retorted the Sheikh. (He had been put out ever since I insinuated that they must always have the plague in the place.) "There was a masjid (mosque) here, with a handsome minaret, from whence, in olden times, the mollah used to call us to prayer; but alas! it has all crumbled to ruin now. The fortunes of the sheikhs of Kara Seraï fell when everybody took to helping themselves. There is, indeed, a curse upon the land."

"And will be in any other place," I said to myself, "where there is neither law nor order."

Abd-allah had in the meantime opened a tin of boiled beef, carefully reserved for extreme occasions like the present (the rice did not put in an appearance till midnight), and we both set to work upon it, assisted by mouldy bread. The Sheikh and his friend contemplated our proceedings with very wistful eyes.

"It is pig!" I maliciously ejaculated.

"Shaitan!" shouted the Sheikh. "And do you, a servant of God," addressing Abd-allah, "partake of such obscene food?"

"Master," said Abd-allah, deprecatingly, "is fond of kef (a joke). It is the flesh of ox."

But just at that moment the muleteer rushed into the room in a state of great excitement, exclaiming:

"Kursis! Kursis! The robbers are coming."

And, as if in obedience to his words, in poured a motley group of tattered, unkempt, grisly and sickly-looking beings, some tottering, some faint from fever, and almost all with blotches and sores on their bodies—hideous to look at.

I neither waited for explanation nor expostulation. The scene presented was enough of itself to demand immediate action. Seizing a revolver, whilst Abd-allah took another from his belt, we confronted our visitors, bidding them peremptorily to take themselves off.

"We will have backshish first," exclaimed one of them, in harsh guttural tones, whilst others made futile attempts to brandish their short clubs. Poor plague-stricken bandits! They had barely life left in their veins to carry out their intended assault.

"You shall have nothing of the kind," I shouted. "Were it not that you are a parcel of contaminated wretches, I and Abd-allah would cast you out of the room; but look, we have pistols—they go off not once, but five times—and if you do not take yourselves off we will hit every plague spot in your bodies."

"Allah! Mash-allah!" grunted the miscreants. "These travellers are in conspiracy with Eblis! Is that Shaitan of a Sheikh to have all the booty? Not while we live."

I hesitated. I could not jostle the hideous crew. To have shot

down such miserable creatures would have been little better than murder; yet, to allow them to come into close contact, with their envenomed skins and polluted breath, was almost certain death in its worst form.

A sudden thought flashed across my mind at this juncture. I remembered, when a boy, having seen an old play called "The Miller and his men." I had it. Here was the miller, composedly smoking his chibouk (I wished the mouthpiece had been the head of one of the snakes of the previous evening), and I turned to him:

"Now, Sheikh," I said, and I pointed my revolver at him as I spoke: "order your karabalah (blackguards) out of the room, or I will shoot you as the first of the lot."

"Zara Yoke! Take no heed of them," said the Sheikh. "They are mad with the fever. Go to your house, my men," he added, addressing the intruders, "and I swear by the Prophet whatever backshish the noble traveller bestows upon us shall be fairly divided."

Thus, half pacified, and apparently not exactly liking the appearance of things, they departed, not, however, without audible grumbling.

We were not disturbed during the few hours that remained to us for rest, save by occasional moans and lamentations coming from the quarter of the invisible. All was not happiness in Kara Seraï.

Needless to say, we started from this plague-stricken hole with the earliest dawn. The Sheikh had a backshish in return for his peculiar generosity, but I feel certain his followers had from out of it only some infinitesimally small paras.

But, oh! how delighted we were, when after splashing through miles of mud, we gained terra firma, and began to ascend a range of granite mountains just as the sun was rising—the quartz and mica glittering in its beams.

Abd-allah smiled, and even the stolid muleteer grinned, as I turned round and waved my hand to bid adieu to the "Black Valley," with its ruinous Seraï, its disreputable Sheikh, and its mournful river.



A LITTLE MAID, AN OLD MAID, AND THE MAJOR.

BY JOYCE DARRELL.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. SHERLOCK SHOWS HER DISPLEASURE.

HIS wife! The news fell like a bomb-shell upon Silcombe. It horrified even Mrs. Sherlock, for the Bowens had distinctly told her that Major Murdoch was a widower. Unfortunately, reference to them at the moment was impossible, for they had gone off to Paris for a fortnight's holiday, and being bad correspondents, had not yet written to give any address.

The tide of comment consequently flowed on unchecked. Everybody felt that to have passed for a widower, as they persisted in thinking Major Murdoch had done, was a thing to the last degree discreditable.

Then the circumstances of his wife's death seemed to the wiseacres most suspicious. Where had she been before her arrival at Silcombe? Why had she come thither at all? How could the Major have let her live alone in her deplorable state of health?

Was it not shocking that even little Paul had never mentioned his mother—his "poor dying mother?"—Silcombe hastened pathetically to add.

"It is most painful—shocking. Even I, who never gossip, feel compelled to say so much," said Miss Dodson, who had called expressly on Mrs. Sherlock, and poured forth all the scandal that was choking her, undeterred by her hostess's stiffness. "Little did I think when she forced her way into my house that day, that such a dreadful thing was to happen. An elegant, refined young creature she certainly was. The Major always struck me as a man of bad character. I have said so over and over again to Miss Tippany, who is a good creature, although a little absurd, and a terrible gossip, as you know. 'My dear Miss Tippany,' I have said; 'you mark my words; that man is an impostor; and I wonder that nice, innocent Mrs. Sherlock can be so taken in by him.'"

"Indeed, Miss Dodson, you need not have been at the trouble of pitying me. I am not more innocent than anybody else, and I am at a loss to imagine what you can mean by saying that Major Murdoch took me in."

"Well, don't be offended, my dear madam. Perhaps you have been wide awake the whole time. But you cannot deny that yours

is the only house at which Major Murdoch has visited, and that he has been here perpetually."

"Perpetually? Miss Dodson, I think that you might measure your words more! Major Murdoch was introduced to me by my dear brother-in-law, Dr. Bowen, and we received him kindly, being under great obligations to him for saving the life of darling Jack. But we have never grown especially intimate with him."

"Not even Miss Carleton?" inquired Miss Dodson, with a disagreeable smile.

Mrs. Sherlock, already flushed, grew pinker. "Is it your intention to insult my niece?"

"Good gracious—no! I never insult anybody. In fact, as a rule I never talk to people about themselves or their affairs. But we have always been friendly, my dear Mrs. Sherlock, and I felt that it would be ungenerous on my part not to make at least one effort to open your eyes and ears to all that is going on around you."

Mrs. Sherlock, who regarded herself as a person of considerable penetration, began to feel so exasperated that she could not trust herself to do more than stiffly bend her head; and Miss Dodson rapidly continued.

"You have never guessed, of course, that for months past Miss Carleton's secret previous acquaintance and clandestine correspondence with Major Murdoch have been the talk of the place. As long as he was taken for a widower, there was no great harm in it, one might think. At any rate I thought so, and said so; and over and over again I begged people not to interfere. 'Don't enlighten Mrs. Sherlock,' I said; 'leave the poor unsuspecting woman to her belief in her niece.' But now, of course, things are different. A man who, while still married, could behave as Major Murdoch did, is no fit acquaintance for any young girl. He should be banished from every respectable house. Certainly he will never be allowed to darken my doors again."

"I am obliged to you. I can manage my own affairs. And—and I think I will bid you good morning."

Trembling with anger, Mrs. Sherlock rose as she spoke and made Miss Dodson an old-fashioned, formal little curtsy. That lady stared.

"So that's the way you take it! Well, to be sure! I am nicely rewarded. It is the first time I have ever tittle-tattled, and it will certainly be the last. You wish me to go, you say? Oh! I am going, madam, I am going. I never stay anywhere unless I am wanted. Fortunately I have plenty of friends, superior people, endowed with brains and breeding. They would be shocked at the idea of a young girl carrying on flirtations with a married man, and sending him money—actually *money*! But morals at Silcombe appear to be peculiar; as peculiar as the manners—to me both are new, and I—but it's no matter—I—ah! *good morning*!"

And away flounced Miss Dodson, leaving Mrs. Sherlock rooted to the middle of her own drawing-room with horror and rage. She stood perfectly motionless for a few moments, bewildered by the rush of new suspicions, ideas and feelings. Then she suddenly crossed the room with the swift step of a person who has come to a determination, and opening the door let herself out with a sharp bang.

She was hardly gone, when a small golden head appeared peeping cautiously through the curtains that hung in front of a bow window at one side of the room. Assured that everybody but herself had departed, out trotted Effie, who, forgotten by her aunt, had been an unsuspected listener to the late conversation.

She had an indefinite but very firm idea that she ought not to have heard, and that silence on her part would consequently be highly commendable. So instead of following in Mrs. Sherlock's footsteps, she tripped out of an open window, and was presently to be seen wandering with an innocent and unconcerned air among the rose-bushes in the back garden.

Mrs. Sherlock meanwhile had gone in search of Maud, with the intention of severely cross-questioning her. But Maud was out, and this check gave a fresh direction to Mrs. Sherlock's thoughts. She decided not to speak but to watch. The idea of playing the part of an amateur detective was rather pleasing to her—the more so that Miss Dodson's accusations of innocence and blindness rankled deeply. So she decided to say nothing for the present to Maud, but endeavour to discover how far the talk of the neighbourhood was founded. She remembered her niece's mysterious blushes at the mention of Major Murdoch's name, and Effie's story of the meeting at the post-office. She began to feel quite proud of herself for having taken note of the circumstances at the time, and felt more indignant than ever with Miss Dodson, who could think her unsuspecting.

Too excited to sit quietly at home as usual, she went out for a walk, taking Effie with her at the child's request. As ill luck would have it, the first person they met was Major Murdoch. He stopped to speak, as usual, when Mrs. Sherlock, still vibrating from her late reflections, passed him with the stiffest of bows. He stood still with amazement, and the colour rushed to his brow. Effie, indeed, nodded patronisingly to him over her shoulder: but he did not heed her. His feelings were profoundly hurt, and he was conscious of a deeper pang than he had imagined he could ever experience again from the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

With the quick conclusions of a sensitive nature, he explained Mrs. Sherlock's conduct by his wife's late apparition on the scene. He was conscious that Silcombe had not thought the better of him for that unfortunate circumstance. He guessed that ill-natured reports were about, and instantly attributed belief in them to Mrs. Sherlock.

Well, if she must think evil of him she must; he was not going to trouble to justify himself. It hurt him to reflect that he should not

go again to Elm Tree Cottage, hurt him much more than he expected. But he was not accustomed of late years to be happy, and had resigned many pleasant things, so that a certain facility of renunciation had come to be a habit with him. He believed that to give up his visits to Jack Carleton's family would cost him one pang, and then be thought of no more.

He had little Paul, and he had his profession. Was he not soon going back to India, thither to carry one painful burden the less, and some sharp, regretful memories the more? Few of his experiences in England had been agreeable. In three or four months more the recollection of Mrs. Sherlock's snub would be merged in the general indifference of his retrospect.

He met her once again before her walk was ended, and this time only slightly raised his hat, while he looked steadily in front of him. She, on her side, cut him direct; for like many gentle natures she had, when once roused, the power of accumulating anger unreasonably; and by this time she had persuaded herself that Major Murdoch was a fiend.

Things went rapidly from bad to worse. Little Paul no longer came to Elm Tree Cottage, and turned his head another way when he saw Alfie and Bobby in the street. With the quick instinct of his precocious heart he had divined, rather than learnt by any speech of the Major's, that some cause of quarrel had arisen between the latter and Mrs. Sherlock.

To know this and to blame everybody except his father with Paul was one and the same thing. To show the faintest particle of regret, in his view would have been treachery. He did want desperately sometimes to talk to Effie, but would have died of his longing rather than gratify it, for did not those who hurt or offended his father hurt and offend him?

So he walked past his late friends with a little pale, set face of resolute avoidance, and was quite unaware that Effie several times nearly nodded her curly head off in her efforts to attract his attention.

Loud and frequent was the wondering, and indignant the disappointment expressed by Alfie, Bobby and Edith at this new aspect of affairs. The regret of the latter, indeed, was made more poignant by ungratified curiosity. For Mrs. Sherlock had coldly said one day: "I have reason to think Major Murdoch an undesirable acquaintance," and then immovably abstained from uttering another syllable.

Edith tried to question her, but was promptly set down.

Maud, although tortured by conjecture, had not the courage to interrogate, for the events of the last week or two had plunged her into a whirl of feeling which perplexed as much as it distressed her. Mrs. Sherlock observing her silence and drawing sundry sapient conclusions from it was only confirmed in her own.

All at once Paul fell ill of diphtheria, and for three or four days was at the point of death. The Major shut himself up with the child and the servant, and saw nobody but the doctor. The sympathy expressed for him was tepid. Terror for their own children kept fathers and mothers away; and as he was now the *bête noir* of Silcombe, even the fussily benevolent left him to his fate.

Mrs. Sherlock, indeed, wrote him a stiff epistle, in the third person, presenting her compliments, regretting that consideration for the children in her own household prevented her visiting Paul, and begging to be informed if there was anything she could procure him which the invalid would like. It was a singularly inconsistent step on her part—one of the odd compromises, in fact, which illogical and kind-hearted people make with their consciences.

Not unnaturally the Major resented it almost more than he had done her cutting him, and declined her offers in an epistle as formal and curter than her own. All communication then ceased between the two houses for five or six days, when it was suddenly re-opened in an unexpected manner.

Effie had been greatly pre-occupied about Paul's illness, and had never passed Vine Cottage without glancing wistfully and inquisitively up at the windows of the room where he lay. She had begged to be allowed to visit him, and cried when told that it would be impossible in any case, and dangerous to herself even if possible.

But as everything is known in Silcombe, about the tenth day of Paul's illness it was known that he was fairly convalescent.

The news was brought to Maud by a visitor to her studio, who shortly afterwards departed to carry it elsewhere. Maud had heard the announcement with deep thankfulness but had said very little; and Effie who was a listener to the conversation had said nothing.

These two sisters, the eldest and the youngest, were alone at the time, Mrs. Sherlock having taken the two boys and Edith on a clothing expedition to town. Maud had been glad of the rest. It was a relief to be saved for one whole day from the necessity of keeping up an appearance of cheerfulness; for before Effie she felt no constraint, unaware as she was how much that small person's natural perspicacity was sharpened by secret knowledge.

The brief daylight was fading, and Maud, laying down her paint-brush, drew near to the fire, where Effie sat with her favourite kitten on her lap. Unbroken silence reigned for some minutes, during which the kitten after some lazy blinking at the flames, shut its eyes tight and went to sleep.

Maud was so lost in thought that she started, at last, when Effie's small treble broke on her ear.

"Maudie, it's a *very* good thing, isn't it, that poor little Paul is better?"

"Of course, darling."

"His father must be very glad, Maudie."

"Yes."

"Because he has only Paul in all the wide, *wide* world," pursued Effie impressively.

"Why, childie, how do you know that?" asked Maud with a little tremor in her voice.

"Paul told me so. He means never to go away, but to stay with his papa always; so I daresay he prayed to God not to take him now. Don't you think he did?"

"Very likely."

"And it was kind of God to listen, as it would have been *inconvenient* for his papa to have gone to heaven now with Paul, as he wasn't ill, you see; and you must be ill before you can die, mustn't you?"

"Not always. Major Murdoch might have been killed in war."

"But there isn't any war here," said Effie with a silvery laugh of very merry scorn. "Oh, Maudie, you weren't thinking of what you were saying then, were you?"

Then, as Maud only smiled in reply, the child continued: "You would be sorry if Major Murdoch died; you would cry dreadfully; because you are so fond of him."

Maud blushed violently. "Effie, what are you talking about?"

"You are, Maudie; or you wouldn't write to him on the sly, and Auntie Hester wouldn't have been so angry with Miss Dodson."

"Aunt Hester! Miss Dodson! Effie, what on earth do you mean?"

Whereupon Effie, in her rambling yet extremely clear fashion, managed to convey to Maud the essence of the interview between Miss Dodson and Mrs. Sherlock, to which, three weeks previously, she had been an unseen listener. Why she had kept the secret so long and why she told it now, were two things that could only be explained by more insight than we possess into the inscrutable workings of childish logic.

"He looked so surprised when Auntie Hester would not speak to him," continued Effie. "But I daresay he understands now, for auntie wrote to him when Paul fell ill, and I 'spect she told him she was angry because you sent him letters."

Maud's blood froze in her veins. Effie's story told her a great deal but it did not tell everything. She wondered what the exact measure of Miss Dodson's knowledge had been, and how much she had communicated to Mrs. Sherlock. Had the latter learnt about the money? And could she—oh *could* she have said anything on the subject to Major Murdoch? She had written to him as Effie said, and as the reader already knows; but she had been very reticent concerning the whole thing to her nieces, and had shown them neither her own note nor Major Murdoch's answer.

Such reserve boded ill, as Maud knew by previous experience. It

generally meant that Mrs. Sherlock, turning suddenly from mildness to mulishness, had done something supremely foolish. A perfect panic seized Maud, and coming as it did at a moment when her spirits were broken by much secret perplexity and pain, it was altogether more than she could bear. She bent her head on her hands and burst into tears.

Effie was consternated and did her best at consolation. "Oh, Maudie, don't cry!" she entreated. "Auntie won't be angry long. You didn't mean any harm. Just tell her that, and promise not to write to Major Murdoch any more."

"You don't understand, darling," said Maud, taking the child on her knees and tenderly stroking her golden curls. "I am not one bit ashamed of having written to Major Murdoch. I only did it once, and I could not say anything about it for reasons which you would not understand even if I explained them to you. But I was not wrong, although I was foolish: and I am not crying because Aunt Hester is angry."

Effie raised her big eyes, wonder in their depths. "Then why do you cry?"

"Because we ought all of us always to have been kind to Major Murdoch, who saved Jack's life; and now I fear that he has been badly treated and is hurt," said Maud firmly.

"And will that make him sad?" inquired Effie.

"Probably."

"And Paul, too?"

"I daresay. For one thing, Paul must miss *you*, Effie. He has a sorrowful little life at the best, and now he has no children to talk to in Silcombe."

"Then he feels very lonely?"

"I am sure he often does. Poor little heart!" said Maud dreamily and tenderly.

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by a servant who came with some domestic trouble to claim Maud's attention.

She had to betake herself to the kitchen, and left Effie to her own devices. The child followed her part of the way down the passage; then was arrested in her purpose by the escape of the kitten, which, attracted by the sight of a door ajar, frisked off into the garden.

Effie ran out after him. It was a frosty, but lovely night, and the moon was shining brilliantly. The child stood for a moment looking about her, herself an ethereal, radiant little figure with her white woollen dress and golden hair. Unconsciously her imagination was seized by the beauty of the moonlight and the soft sighing of the wind through the leafless branches of the trees. She began to feel excited and adventurous. Suddenly she had a vivid picture of Paul lying in his little bed staring, perhaps, at the moon which was looking in at him in a friendly manner through the window. Poor little Paul, with no playmate but the moon!

Effie had reached the garden-gate by this time, and found it open.

There was not a creature visible in the road, which stretched broad, brightly illumined and tempting before her. Just where it made a turn, one side of Vine Cottage was visible. That was the gable end in which Paul's room was situated. Effie remembered that, and looked longingly towards it. Presently the longing became an impulse, an irresistible impulse, and with a furtive glance round, the little maiden tripped through the gate, then fled like a sprite down the shining path.

CHAPTER V.

EFFIE'S VISIT.

PAUL was lying in his bed, with the moon looking in at him through the unshuttered window just as Effie had imagined. He had been left alone for a few moments—his father having gone for a brief walk—the first for more than a week, while the servant stepped out to fetch something.

Paul had been dozing, and awakened to find that the moon, which he had longed for, had come round to the window just opposite his bed, and made a broad band of light in that one spot, while the rest of the room was only faintly illumined by the flicker of a small fire.

The whole effect was dreamy, and Paul, still very weak, dropped again into a semi-somnolent state, haunted by visions from the fairy tale that his father had been softly reading to him an hour before.

It seemed to the boy as if some ethereal visitant from that untrodden land of magic flitted suddenly across the moonlit space just as his eyes were closing.

The fall of an ember suddenly roused him again. He looked up, and became aware that in the shadow at the foot of his bed stood a tiny white-clad figure, with shining hair and serious, startled eyes.

"Effie!" exclaimed Paul, and the child came forward and stood by him in silence.

She had not been prepared to see him lying there so weak and pale; even in the moonlight she could see how shrunken his little face was, how thin his hands, and unconsciously to herself the sight of him thus awed her.

Paul looked at her in bewilderment for an instant, every other thought swallowed up in amazement at her apparition. Then all at once he remembered the feud, and sullenly turned his head away.

"Won't you speak?" said Effie timidly.

No answer.

"Can't you speak? Are you too ill?"

This was too much for Paul, who felt anxious for her to understand that his silence arose from wounded dignity and not incapacity.

"I'm astonished to see you," he said loftily.

"I ran away. Auntie is not at home, and Maud won't be angry. But she must be looking for me everywhere." And Effie laughed. That elfin peal of merriment ruffled Paul, who relapsed into silence.

"Alfy and Bobby are gone to town," continued his small visitor with the same provoking unconcern. "But I should not have brought them if they'd been at home. Boys are so rough and stupid! I mean those that aren't ill."

Even the flattery implied in this subtle remark did not soften Paul. On the contrary, he saw the opportunity to make a cutting rejoinder, and seized it at once.

"I don't care for Alfy and Bobby to come, or in fact for *anybody*——" very distinctly.

Quietly, like a spirit, Effie lapsed from the moonlit space, and disappeared into the darkness behind Paul's bed. He felt disappointed: a fact for which he was unprepared, but nothing, he determined, should induce him to show such weakness. This spartan state of mind lasted for five minutes; at the end of which time he twisted his head round slightly, and took a fugitive survey out of the corner of his eye.

"I thought you were gone; and the stairs are dark; you might fall," he said politely.

Thereupon, Effie emerging at once, stood again by his bed, her whole attitude very wistful.

"I came to ask your papa to forgive Maud, because she frets and cries—you should see how she cries," said the little maiden earnestly.

"Papa is out. When he comes in you can tell him. But that would be so long for you to wait," answered Paul, with an air of official consideration.

"Oh! I don't mind. I've nothing to do," said Effie obligingly. "Do you know I've got a new kitten, a grey one. It's always hiding itself, naughty little thing, it's so tiresome! But I'll bring it to-morrow to show you, shall I?"

"Thanks. I don't care."

"Oh, yes, Paul! I'm sure you'd like to see it. It would *amuse* you."

"I don't want to be amused."

A moment's pause. "Won't you make friends?" said Effie pleadingly.

"No."

"Never again?"

"Never."

She leant over him and laid her small fingers caressingly on his cheek. "Don't be cross, Paul, dear Paul," she said in coaxing tones. "Say that you will love me just like at first."

He was melting visibly. The tears even came into his eyes, but

he blinked them away indignantly, and sturdily choked down a treacherous sob, as he answered.

"People should not be unkind to papa."

He expected a protest, but none came. For Effie had laid her cheek on his down-stuffed pillow, and, childlike, was quite absorbed in noticing how soft it was. She went on lifting her curly head and dropping it again with a rhythmical motion, while Paul began to feel aggrieved at her silence and the unconscious contempt with which she had received his latest remark.

"If you'll promise not to be unkind any more, I'll forgive you—and Maud," he said at last.

"I promise," exclaimed Effie brightly, and putting her arms round his neck, she kissed him.

"Good Heavens! How did that child come here?"

This sharp exclamation proceeded from the doorway, on the threshold of which Major Murdoch had paused, while behind him stood the scared figure of the breathless and conscience-stricken maid.

"Please, sir, I haven't been five minutes gone," she began un-
-veraciously, when he cut her short by unceremoniously closing the door. Then he approached the bed in haste and drew Effie away.

"Who sent you here, little one?"

She shrank back in frightened silence, thinking he was annoyed, whereupon Paul eagerly interposed.

"Papa, don't be angry—don't scold her—she's such a little thing! She's come to say Maud is sorry for being unkind, and cries all day. So I said I'd forgive her this once, and so will you—won't you?"

The Major did not reply immediately. He went to the window and pulled down the blinds, then lighted a pair of candles, and finally sitting down drew Effie to his knee.

"Tell me what all this means, my dear," he said kindly. "Why does your sister cry?"

The events of the past fortnight were too complicated for Effie to explain them; but with native acuteness she went straight to the central fact.

"Auntie is angry because Maud wrote to you," she answered, fixing her large eyes gravely on the Major's face.

"Wrote to me? Your sister?"

"And Maud cries because you are hurt."

"But Maud never wrote to me."

"Yes." And Effie nodded pertinaciously.

"This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed the Major in his perplexity, turning quite seriously to Paul. "I never had a letter from Miss Carleton in my life."

"Maudie wrote—she told me she did," reiterated Effie.

"Papa, perhaps she wrote *anonymously*, like the person who sent you the money," suggested Paul.

"Maudie sent you money. Miss Dodson said so!" exclaimed Effie, with a sudden flash of memory.

The Major gasped. It abruptly occurred to him that one day at Elm Tree Cottage he had caught sight of Maud's handwriting, which was rather peculiar, and had vaguely recognised it as a hand that he had seen somewhere before. He remembered now—it was the same writing as that of the superscription on the envelope which he had precipitately burnt—the envelope containing the mysterious ten pounds.

This discovery affected him strangely, and there was a curious ring in his voice as he again addressed Effie.

"Try and tell me everything, my dear. Do you say your aunt is angry with your sister?"

"Miss Dodson made her angry. She said everybody was talking about Maud, and saying she was wicked, and you too. But Maud does not mind. She says she won't say why she wrote to you, and she doesn't care about the unkind people, and she only cries because you are offended."

"And did you come here all alone to say this?"

"Yes. I ran away!" cried Effie, with returning glee at the thought, and looking up merrily in the Major's face.

He gave the tiny form one irresistible hug; then, struck by a sudden alarming thought, rose hastily exclaiming, "You must go, darling, and at once."

Calling the maid he bid her explain to Miss Carleton that the little girl had found the hall-door of Vine Cottage open and had slipped upstairs. How long she had been there the Major did not know, but he would send to inquire the next day if she had taken cold.

Suddenly realising at this point that she had on no outdoor clothing, he fetched a large fur-lined cloak that had seen much rough service under alien skies and beside camp fires, and clumsily but tenderly he wrapped the child up in it.

She, now in the wildest spirits, was enchanted with this attire, especially when the big hood was drawn round her golden curls and fell over her nose.

"Paul, don't I look like a great, big, furry bear? Maud won't know me. She'll be quite frightened till she sees my face."

Paul, equally delighted with this notion, wrinkled up his little white face with laughter. But the Major, apparently in a great fidget now, said there must be no more delay, and hurried Effie off.

She wanted to kiss Paul again, but this was not allowed; the Major's brow even contracting with some secret thought as he refused the request. So Effie had to be satisfied with pressing up her rosy mouth and blowing kisses all along her passage to the door, besides calling out—"Good-bye, Paul, dear Paul," half-a-dozen times at least.

When she was fairly gone (to be met, it may be said, by Maud and

two frightened servants in the road) the Major sat down beside his little son's bed and fell into a reverie. For years no such thoughts had poured balm on his wounded spirit as soothed and consoled it now.

He was a man to whom, as already said, Fate had doled out but a stepmother's meed of kindness. He was very modest, manly, brave, with a simple and earnest ideal of duty. These are great qualities, but they need some great crisis to call them out. So it followed that while other men basked in the sunlight of official favour, Arthur Murdoch had quietly worked and waited in the shade. Waited—while the years slipped by and brought him the failure of many hopes, the blighting of many illusions, the destruction of more than one great trust. Worked—until the full and patient, unrewarded achievement of every task allotted to him had come to be almost the only joy that life could still afford.

In the isolation of spirit, to which some elements of special bitterness had recently been added, the Major was profoundly touched by the knowledge of Maud's impulsive generosity. The anonymous gift which at one time had looked too much like an alms to recommend itself to his pride, suddenly came to have a rare and precious significance. He recalled all the circumstances of his first meeting with Maud in the waiting-room of the railway station, and remembered that he had sat beside her perusing with some bitterness a letter of refusal to the first request for money which he had ever addressed to a living soul.

Paul had been very ill with a malady which, if less acute, had been longer and more trying than that from which he was now recovering. Claims, at all times burdensome, had pressed more heavily than ever on the Major and drained his slender purse. The doctors urged the necessity of an immediate removal of Paul to the country, averring that in purer air lay his best chance of life. The boy himself—with one of those invalid's fancies which are so touching in a child—had longed for the change intensely.

The next money the Major was to receive would not be due for a fortnight. Under these circumstances, beset on every side and harassed in a thousand ways, he had, after a severe struggle, decided on applying to his only near relative, a baronet uncle, for an advance of twenty pounds. His letter remained for some weeks unanswered; and meanwhile Paul had been invited to stay at the Abbey, and things had insensibly righted themselves as things so often do.

Major Murdoch regretted ever having written his letter, and regretted it still more the day when the tardy answer at last came, containing a curt refusal.

It had reached him at a bad moment, when many things had combined to make life seem even gloomier than usual. With an impulse of self-tormenting cynicism very rare in him, he had taken out the letter, while waiting for his train, and read it a second time.

Then it was that Maud had caught sight of it, as he stooped to lift her dropped package—the Major understood it all now, and recalled the pitying, troubled glance from her lovely eyes which at the time had interested, perplexed and a little annoyed him.

Then as soon as she returned home she had drawn out a part, perhaps all, of her earnings, and sent them to him anonymously ! It was a generous act, and how badly it had been rewarded ! All the village had been talking of it, deforming its grace and defiling its purity. The Major's blood boiled at the thought !

The next day Paul was not quite so well. Perhaps he had been rather too much excited by Effie's visit ; perhaps he was only passing through one of the many mysterious phases of convalescence. However that might be, the Major—more distrustful now than ever of the servant—could not leave him, and was consequently forced to delay the execution of a project which he had conceived.

Some twenty-four hours later, however, the boy having taken a decidedly favourable turn, the Major started off and somewhat astonished Dr. Dodson by calling on him. They had hardly met, and had not spoken since the day of Mrs. Murdoch's death—the young doctor having chosen, in common with almost everybody else, to assume that some mystery, disgraceful to Arthur Murdoch, lay under that unlucky circumstance.

To surprise succeeded consternation when the Major, somewhat curtly, announced that he had come to seek an explanation of Miss Dodson's unwarrantable use of his own and Miss Carleton's name. The doctor at first was a little inclined to bluster, but this tendency vanished before his visitor's cool firmness. Perplexed and angry, but vanquished, he helplessly called in his sister.

The reader's imagination can easily supply her behaviour. She began by declaring that nobody had ever called her to account for her words before. Then she tried insolence, but was scared into silence by a sudden flash of the Major's eyes. Her accuser's determination held her as in a vice. Her brother, having always been dominated by her, deserted her, as was inevitable, in the hour of need ; and she finally extricated herself in the best way she could by giving up the name of Mrs. Welbrow as her informant.

The Major then betook himself to the post-mistress, and inflicted on that aggrieved functionary a rebuke such as she had rarely listened to. She was frightened at the possible prospect of being reported and losing her post, and for three days she hardly gossiped to anybody, and to Miss Dodson never again.

Major Murdoch's next step was to write to Maud. In a few manly, grateful words he expressed his sense of her exquisite kindness, and had the delicacy to attribute it, in great measure, to her knowledge of his friendship with Jack. He enclosed her a cheque for ten pounds, "the aid which her generous loan had supplied being," as he expressed it, "no longer needed ;" and he concluded by asking

if she would trust him sufficiently to authorise him to stamp out, in his own way, the malignant gossip to which her self-forgotten impulse had so unaccountably given rise.

The Major read over his note when he had finished it: then gave an impatient, regretful sigh. "God bless her!" he thought: "I wish she could read between the lines and understand all that I feel and cannot, dare not say. Will she think me cold, I wonder? But I have no right to wonder about it. No right to cast, even by so much as one moment's longing, the shadow of my sorrowful and wasted life over her pure spirit—my gentle darling!"

Maud's answer came back—a few hurried lines written in pencil. "I thank you earnestly," she wrote. "I leave everything in your hands. But for myself I care, at this moment, neither for good nor evil report. My little sister is ill with diphtheria."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR'S REVENGE.

It was too true. Effie fell ill on the evening of the very day succeeding her visit to Paul. Perhaps she caught the disease from him; perhaps she would have taken it in any case. The origin mattered little once the fatal fact was there.

It is needless to dwell on the agony of those days.

The child's sweetness had never been more apparent—never bound her more closely to the hearts that now only throbbed in the one passionate prayer for her recovery.

For five days she hung between death and recovery; for yet another five it was doubtful whether the terrible disease even when leaving her had granted strength enough for her to struggle back to life.

But at last Maud's agonised watching had its reward—a morning dawned when Effie smiled with her old smile to the faces round her bed: when her tiny face looked less wan and wasted, and when the paralysing weakness left her little tender limbs.

All Silcombe had been absorbingly interested in her: and most frequent, in the first days of the illness, among inquiring callers was the Major. He had even made an effort to see Mrs. Sherlock; but she had refused to receive him. According to her peculiar mode of reasoning, it was primarily his fault that Effie had fallen ill: and she took her stand upon principle in marking her sense of his conduct.

The poor Major was very unhappy, not because of Mrs. Sherlock's anger, indeed; but because of Effie's sufferings, and the dreadful possibility of her owing them to his own boy's kiss. His kind heart was torn for the child and torn for Maud. But there was no one to whom he could say it, as he was more out of favour than ever, Mrs. Sherlock's point of view having many participators, who had almost

brought themselves to regard Major Murdoch as a baleful personage, sowing sin and sorrow wherever he went.

In the midst of all this the Bowens, who had extended their tour to the Riviera and been a month away, came home.

Almost on the same day the Major received a telegram which seemed to cause him some perturbation of spirit. He hastily packed his things, gave up his house, and prepared for departure, having previously made arrangements with his friends at the Abbey (who had no children) once again to receive the still feeble, though now thoroughly convalescent, Paul.

The news of his sudden flitting being speedily known caused some excitement. But as he called to bid farewell to nobody in Silcombe, nobody was able to question him, or divine from his manner the reason of his move.

The one family that he took leave of were the Bowens. That is to say, he was closeted one morning with the Doctor for a good hour, during which time Mrs. Bowen suffered some pangs of curiosity. She was afraid "poor Arthur Murdoch" had come to borrow money of her good husband, and hoped the latter would not be so imprudent as to lend any.

The interview over, the Major bid her a hasty good-bye, and was seen to the door by Doctor Bowen, who returned rubbing his hands and looking rather mysterious and alert. His better-half asked a few dexterous questions, but received only unsatisfactory answers, and began to feel more convinced than ever about the borrowing.

"I am afraid he will never do any good for himself—that poor fellow," she said.

"Oh! I don't know," answered the Doctor absently; then asked, after some minutes' meditation: "You know that old cat at Silcombe, the young Doctor's sister, don't you, Mary?"

"We have just exchanged cards. And she has invited us to an afternoon tea for the day after to-morrow. But I intend to decline."

"Don't!" said the Doctor briskly. "I should like to go."

Mrs. Bowen was petrified, but as her husband took himself away without vouchsafing any further remark, she had no choice but obedience, mixed with still greater curiosity.

Who so delighted as Miss Dodson when in the middle of her party the door opened to admit the comfortable-looking and worthy couple into whose well-kept house it was one of her social ambitions to penetrate? She was flushed already, but grew pinker with gratification, and some of her emotion communicated itself to her faithful lieutenant, Miss Tippy, who remembered that even "poor mamma" had always considered people like the Bowens unobjectionable.

"Really!" exclaimed Miss Dodson, "this is *most* kind. My dear friend Mrs. Weston" (the squire's wife) "sent me an excuse five minutes ago; but now I declare I feel indemnified. Dear Mrs.

Bowen, do sit down. A cup of tea, after your cold drive. Your good husband is looking ten years younger than when I saw him last, I vow. And how is your sweet little niece? Such anxiety you must have felt about her. Were you not angry with that strange Major Murdoch for allowing the children to meet? I was furious. And although I never mix myself up in my neighbours' affairs, I positively was tempted on this occasion to give him a piece of my mind."

"I am afraid he won't get it now. He's gone away," said Doctor Bowen from a post of vantage on the hearthrug.

He spoke very loudly, and the fifteen or sixteen people present stopped dropping remarks down the empty wells of one another's minds to listen to him.

"Yes, indeed, vanished altogether," answered Miss Dodson effusively. "And indulgent though I hope I am, I cannot help feeling his loss is a gain to Silcombe."

"What's more," continued the Doctor impressively, "I don't think he will ever return—at any rate—as Major Murdoch."

A general gasp.

"An impostor!" exclaimed Miss Dodson. "I always said so——"

"You showed your penetration. He did not look like a gentleman, did he?"

"Not one atom."

"Nor behave like one?"

"Quite the contrary——"

"And he was excessively vicious——"

"A *vile* man——"

"A bad husband——"

"Oh!" Miss Dodson threw up her hands and eyes in an assentient horror.

"A worse father——"

"You may well say so——"

"And an unprincipled flirt——"

The Doctor let his eyes travel round the circle in search of a dissenting opinion. Evidently there was not one. Only his wife was staring at him with an air of stupefaction.

"*Dear* Dr. Bowen!" cried Miss Dodson, almost with tears in her eyes, "how beautiful it is to hear you say all this! It is what everybody has felt, but few have said. But now that you, who know the ways of the world and the wickedness of men, have had the courage to proclaim it, surely we also can own what we have always thought; namely, that this so-called Major was a monster."

"It's a sad pity," said Dr. Bowen, quietly stirring his tea, "for now he is a baronet."

A faint shriek seemed to pervade the assembly, and Miss Dodson looked as if she were on the brink of a fit.

"Sir Arthur Murdoch, and possessor of a fine place in the north

—worth, I believe, £10,000 a-year. I am sure you must all be very pleased to hear this, especially you, Miss Dodson, who like to think the best of everybody. You will have ten thousand golden reasons in every year for thinking better than ever now of our friend and late neighbour the Major."

"You have come to my house to turn me into ridicule, Dr. Bowen," exclaimed the hostess loudly as soon as she recovered her voice. She was purple with mortification and anger, but her coarse courage stood her in good stead. Dr. Bowen was a gentleman, and felt the force of her rebuke.

"I admit that my conduct is not irreproachable, but it is susceptible of some excuse," he answered, more gravely than he had yet spoken. "I have known Sir Arthur for many years. I have watched his blameless life and pitied his misfortunes. He was married to a woman who disgraced him by her habits, and half-ruined him by senseless extravagance. I was under the impression—gathered I do not now know in what way—that she had died a year or two ago on the Continent. This, as we have all learnt lately, was a mistake. She wandered here, impelled, perhaps, by some instinct of her approaching end—in all probability to seek a reconciliation with her husband. By fits and starts she used to try for that; but as a rule she lived abroad, and between ill health and other necessities was a sad expense to him. But she is dead, and we must leave her memory in peace; the more so that her husband would, I know, be the first to deprecate blame of her; for he is a brave and gallant officer, and a gentleman to his heart's core."

"Indeed he is, hubby," interposed Mrs. Bowen, who, between affection for the new-made baronet and admiration of her consort's eloquence, was worked up to high excitement. The Doctor shared her emotion on both grounds, and he resumed with glistening eyes:

"My niece, Maud Carleton, felt a warm interest—an interest which did her honour—in the Major, who saved her brother's life. Chance made her acquainted with the fact that his means were very straitened, and, acting on a romantic impulse, she sent him ten pounds anonymously, although at the moment she had never spoken a word to him, and he was probably ignorant even that she existed. On all that happened subsequently I need not dwell," and Dr. Bowen's voice grew sterner. "Slandrous tongues took up my niece's name and attributed unworthy motives to her generous act. By the same back-biters the Major's reputation was assailed. Both victims being unconscious, the scandalous rumours spread. If they can be arrested now, that is a chance which we owe to the deed of a little child. Effie, enlightened by accident and moved by love, carried the tale of all this evil speaking to the Major. Thanks to that visit, she has nearly lost her life; but I hope that the lesson of candour which she has taught us will not be thrown away upon those

who, while losing the simplicity of childhood, have lost also its boundless trust."

"Bless him! Isn't it lovely to hear him!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowen to her neighbour.

"And now," said the Doctor, "I think I may go. I came only to carry out a wish of Sir Arthur's, who desired that I should vindicate my niece in as public a manner as possible."

He paused, and looked round the room for an observation; but none came; surprise and embarrassment keeping even the most sympathetic silent. The Doctor did not wait for the feelings which he saw struggling on some faces to find voice; but signing to his wife to rise, tucked her comfortably under his arm, made a comprehensive bow and departed.

The door had hardly closed on him when ——

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Dodson, and glared around apocalyptically. "A nice lecture some of you have had, to be sure! Did I not always say (but I might as well have talked to stones) that Silcombe beat any place I ever was in for scandal?"

Before anybody else could reply, a wailing answer broke forth from the nervously-sobbing Miss Tippyany.

"It's t-twenty years since poor mamma was laid in her grave" (sob) "but I cherish her p-precepts to this hour. And I know she never would have f-forgiven me for knowing people who talked scandal of a b-baronet."

"And quite right, too," said Miss Dodson approvingly. "That's the most sensible thing I have ever heard you report of your poor mamma, Miss Tippyany. If you had remembered her counsels sooner, or even listened to me, you would not have been in your present scrape. Thank heaven I never interfere in my neighbours' affairs; and so I shall tell my good friend, Sir Arthur, when he comes back, as of course he will do (but a decent time after his wife's death, I hope), to marry that charming little thing, Maud Carleton."

Miss Dodson's kind wish was gratified some months later; but it is not known that she ever found the opportunity of expressing her sentiments to Sir Arthur.

The wild excitement that prevailed on the auspicious day amongst the younger inhabitants of Elm Tree Cottage may easily be imagined.

It was a very quiet wedding. Edith and Effie were the only bridesmaids. The latter devoted herself conspicuously to Paul, having become aware in some subtle way that he was not altogether pleased with the idea that a new mamma was to remove him from the first place in his father's heart. But many of his misgivings took flight at last in the curious and amusing discovery that by the novel arrangement Effie would become his aunt.

A PLAIN GIRL'S STORY.

NOBODY wanted that baby.

The father had realised an enormous fortune in trade, had taken up politics, and his judicious handling of the last had resulted in a peerage. He was getting on in life, when he ceased to be plain Mr. Benson and bloomed forth as Lord Terrick of Terrick Park, and various other holdings. Although he had not infrequently harangued the working people on the luxuries and large tracts of land possessed by a bloated aristocracy, no one knew better than himself the dignity conferred by landed property. He therefore said one thing and did another, as many have done before and since his time. He retained a partnership in the nail manufactory, and made a very successful hit at the head of the right nail when he resolved upon marrying, and marrying a lady. He was fully aware that the agreeable title of "my lord," which surrounded his footsteps with a gentle murmur, was slightly incongruous when applied to himself, and he determined to marry a woman to whom "my lady" was a natural adjunct.

No difficulty about this, everyone knows. The Earl of Ballywally had seven daughters and an encumbered estate. How he greeted the noble nail manufacturer, and invited him to fish for salmon in the Ballywally waters; how the new peer surveyed the seven daughters and finally decided on the youngest, Lady Flora; how Lady Flora, being eighteen, and in love with a penniless soldier of five and twenty, tried to show him that any of her sisters were better fitted for the post of Lady Terrick than she was—these are matters well known. Also the grand wedding, and the welcome home from the Terrick tenantry, and the pale, sweet smiles of the young bride.

A year after there was great expectation. Bonfires were built ready for lighting, the ringers hung about the Terrick Arms waiting their orders, and inside the great house people walked silently and whispered anxiously. At last the old woman who had come from Ireland to nurse the Lady Flora (she had been the darling of her nursery) crept down the great staircase to the library, her heart misgiving her, but a bold front to it all.

"Praise God, yer honour—your lordship has a beautiful child."

Up started the father, a flush on his elderly face.

"A boy?" he cried.

"Nay, yer honour, not this time. It's the finest girl in the world, though."

Down in his chair sat Lord Terrick, angrily glowering at the fire. After a minute's silence, the old nurse spoke, and there was anger in her voice.

"I'll be going back to your lady, my lord. Is there anything to say from your honour?"

"Eh?" he started. "Yes, of course. Very glad it is over. Hope she will soon re——"

Before he finished, nurse was out of the room with a bang, commenting audibly, to the scandal of the servants in the hall, "as hard as his own nails!"

I said nobody wanted that baby, but I was wrong, for the touch of its velvet cheek was the first ray of happiness in the married life of poor Lady Flora. And to last such a little while! For before the argument had fairly been commenced as to the propriety of ringing bells or lighting bonfires, the mother's tired spirit found rest, and the smile on her dead face was all for the tiny girl she left behind.

Lord Terrick never willingly saw the child, and when he did he sighed heavily. He considered his life ruined by the fact that his title would die with him. When the child was a year old, however, and certain matrons were spreading their toils to provide a solace for the widowed nobleman; and when he had sent for the little girl and heaved a deeper sigh than usual over her unconscious head; Lord Terrick died—and snapping the difficult chain of events, left the Honourable Flora Benson heiress-at-law to all he possessed.

Provisionally this bereaved child fell into good hands, and received a sound and wholesome bringing up. The fact revealed itself early that she would have no beauty, and as she grew to girlhood her well cultured mind decided that her money would bring much pretended adoration to her feet, and that she would never have the happy consciousness of believing she was loved for herself. When she was eighteen she confided some of her doubts to her aunt and chaperon, the Lady Margaret O'Kelly; and between reasoning and coaxing persuaded that good and affectionate woman to consent to a romantic plan she had formed.

"You see, Aunt Margaret, though my father was a peer, he was also a man of trade. While I live in state in Surrey, large sums of money are paid to my agents by the managers of the manufactory in Staffordshire. There is Ridwell Grange—two miles only from the works. My father lived there till a peerage and this estate were attained together."

"Well, my dear, and do you want to live at Ridwell Grange? It is your own."

"No—not just that," said Flora, hesitatingly.

"What then, child?" asked her aunt, laying down her knitting and adjusting her spectacles.

"You see, aunt, I want to get away from myself for a little."

"The saints preserve us!" cried the Lady Margaret, although she was a very staunch Protestant, and looked upon a priest as the direct and accredited messenger of the evil one. "What has turned your head?"

"Well, auntie, it's this. I'm very ugly, you know."

"Who said so?" inquired the elder lady, in a peppery tone.

Flora laughed outright.

"My looking-glass. No one else has ever suggested, or ever will suggest such a thing. But I have studied my short, plebeian nose, my little eyes, my mouth——"

"Hold your tongue, child!" cried the Lady Margaret, aghast to find how well acquainted her niece was with her imperfections; and conscious, too, that she and her sisters had many times bewailed that Lady Flora's daughter had not one of her mother's features.

"Please, auntie, let me unfold my plan. Before the lovers of my money-bags begin to buzz about me, I want you to travel with me for a little."

"Travel, my dear?" doubtfully answered Lady Margaret. "I'm a sad coward about going across the water."

"There's no water to cross, Aunt Margaret. I just want to go to Staffordshire."

"Dear me! I asked you if you wanted to live at Ridwell, and you said no."

"I'm a tiresome, provoking, troublesome——"

"Have done, now, and tell me what you do want."

"It's just this. I want to find out what would happen to me if I were poor—I mean, with enough to live on, but not an heiress. I want to live near Ridwell Grange with you, and for nobody to know who we are—just for a few months, to see what the tenants are like and the nail-makers' homes."

"My dear, anybody but my doting self would say you were mad!"

"But you won't say it," whispered Flora. And all that evening they sat like two conspirators arranging their plans with bated breath for leaving the luxurious home at Terrick, and setting up in a small furnished house with two servants, one to be taken with them, the other hired on the spot.

On a dark November evening about eight o'clock the train drew near the station, and Flora's eyes had been fixed with a sort of awe upon several flaming, smoking places—the only things visible in the darkness—where the ceaseless work of the iron-trade was carried on. She fell into a reverie, wondering how many of the human beings were working for her, and was roused by her aunt saying:

"I wonder if the carriage——"

"Auntie, we must take a fly, you know," said Flora, deprecatingly. Luckily they were alone, but for their elderly maid, who most unwillingly connived at this demeaning of her ladies. "You are Miss O'Moore, and I am your niece of the same name. We have a modest little income out of which we are going to do as much good as we can."

Lady Margaret repressed a groan.

"And I'll be calling your ladyship 'my lady' as sure as my name's Martin!" mournfully responded the maid.

"Get a fly, please, and if all the luggage won't go on it, send the rest up to Miss O'Moore, Acacia Cottage. Here's the full address."

It was Flora who undertook all the arrangements, and they were soon landed at the neat little furnished villa they had engaged just outside the town. A tidy Staffordshire woman opened the door, and cosy fires burned in the two little sitting-rooms. Lady Margaret looked round the drawing-room, and across the tiny slip of passage, and muttered :

"Like a doll's house!"

"Yes," said Flora, quickly ; "so neat and tidy."

After a few days things began to settle down, and Flora made the acquaintance of a working clergyman's equally energetic wife. This lady pronounced the party at Acacia Cottage to be evidently quite respectable, and the girl intelligent and inclined to be useful. She also remarked how very plain she was. Her husband agreed with her, but softened the observation by a well-known proverb—"Handsome is," etc.

Flora gained her object, and became acquainted with nail-makers. First she went over her own works under the condescending guidance of a very vulgar manager to whom a large salary was paid. She appeared to be examining nails, but was really occupied in studying the beings who made them. Very grimy, very stolid in most cases, not much imagination being fostered by their work or surroundings. Some looked thin and ill, many of the young workers especially. Flora found out the wages paid to each, and the manager said they were asking an increase, but wouldn't get it.

"What if they strike?" asked Flora.

"They know better. If they did I'd replace them by other men."

It was getting very cold weather now. Flora went to some of the homes. Wretched, dark and damp, in many cases squalid. She had hard work to gain admittance sometimes, and despaired of reaching the people in her assumed character. At times she found it a relief to wander near Ridwell Grange, and was glad to find the place let and well cared for. There were nice cottages near it, and when resting in one after a long walk, Flora met another visitor who knocked and entered cheerily—all the children running forward to meet him. He began fumbling in his pockets for apples, and then as he offered them, caught sight of Flora. The woman said :

"It's Miss O'Moore, sir ; a young lady from the town. She does a deal of good among the nail-makers."

Flora coloured brightly, but before she could disclaim the gentleman said :

"They need friends, ignorant and down-trodden as some are, and puffed with discontent and arrogance the rest. I hear a good deal, for I rent my house from the agent of one of the big firms."

Flora said she had seen some trouble in her short acquaintance with the people, and then telling the woman she must hasten home, she left.

The early shadows of a dull, frosty December day were falling, and she walked quickly as there were two miles of lonely road to travel. Suddenly, from the hedge-row, a wild-looking, dirty man stepped before her. Flora tried to move aside, but the man held out both hands, saying :

"I'm starving. You looks well-fed enough ! Give me money, or it'll be the worse for you."

The girl turned pale, but resolute.

"I have no money—let me pass."

"You've got a watch if you have no money," said the man, "and I'll 'ave it."

His dirty hand just clasped her delicate wrist ; she shrieked for help, though fearing none was near ; then a man's figure, followed by a huge dog, leapt the hedge, and the dog seized the beggar by the shoulder. The wretch let Flora's hand drop with a howl of pain, and the girl felt a dazed darkness surrounding her, and became unconscious.

II.

"My love," said Lady Margaret O'Kelly, "I think our little farce should be ended. We promised to return to Terrick for Christmas, and there is only a fortnight left."

Flora was looking meditatively across the prim little front garden at the milkman's cart.

"You have done all you can for the poor people. I am sure the good vicar and that very gentlemanly man who has Ridwell Grange speak most highly of the good you have worked," pursued her aunt. "And the Grange itself could not be in better hands than Mr. Barrington's—unless you lived there yourself."

"Quite true, auntie," said Flora, turning towards her. "You have been very patient and good to stay so long. I am only sorry to leave my quiet, busy life for all the humbug I shall have to endure."

Lady Margaret looked keenly at her niece.

"You would not be a coward, my dear ?"

"No ; I don't think so, at least. Dear me, there's the door bell, and Hannah is just bringing our cosy tea ! Some old gossip from the villas I daresay—you *are* good-natured to them, auntie !"

But the visitor wore man's attire, and was Mr. Barrington. He came, he said, to ask Miss O'Moore's advice as to some Christmas festivities for the poor, and would her niece do him the kindness to help him ?

"I feel great sympathy in your work, Mr. Barrington, but my niece and I are leaving almost directly."

Mr. Barrington looked up quickly, and met Flora's eyes.

"For Christmas?" he asked in a low voice.

"Altogether," said Flora quietly. "My aunt and I only intended a short stay here."

Mr. Barrington became wonderfully silent and distraught, and drank his tea in an absent manner; breaking in upon some conversation with the inquiry:

"When do you leave?"

"In four days," said Lady Margaret. "Pray have some more toast." Flora left the room to send off some letters, and Mr. Barrington said hastily to her aunt:

"Miss O'Moore, may I see you alone this evening, if I call?"

"Certainly," said Lady Margaret, and a curious smile flitted over her face when he was gone. She mused, "I thought something would come of that day when he rescued her from the beggar—such trifles life hangs on! Dear me, what a tale I have to tell!"

I need scarcely say Mr. Barrington proposed for Flora. Her aunt revealed nothing until she had sent the girl to give her own happy answer.

Then with a great rustle of silk, and unnecessary rattling of door handle, Lady Margaret intruded.

"We have a mystery to explain, Mr. Barrington."

He bowed and stared confusedly at both ladies.

"I am not Miss O'Moore, and that is not my niece's name."

A bewildered expression gathered on the lover's face, and he reached out his hand to make sure Flora still stood near.

"In truth, Mr. Barrington, you are Flora's tenant, as she is Miss Benson, of Terrick Park, and I am her aunt, Lady Margaret O'Kelly."

There was blank silence for some seconds.

"Will you forgive me?" asked Flora shyly.

"My darling! if with all these crushing advantages you still can take me, what have I to forgive? At least, you know I loved you for yourself."

"We are so glad of that," interposed Lady Margaret, hastily brushing a tear from her eye. "Flora has been as my own child might have been, and it would have been a sore thing to see her married for her fortune."

Both Terrick Park and Ridwell Grange saw great rejoicings early in the year, and some of the grimy folk in Staffordshire profited by a marriage which brought the owner of the works and her husband many months of the year amongst them.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.

IN AN OLD CHURCH AISLE.

I PASSED an old, grey, time-worn church
 As twilight softly fell;
 The witching music haunted me
 With its impassioned swell.

I crept into the shadowy aisle,
 So holy, calm and sweet—
 Fit pilgrim's rest for weary soul
 And poor, faint, wandering feet.

A halo-circled musty book
 Caught my sad, dreamy gaze,
 As if some tender gleam had flashed
 Far down the long past days.

I opened it. "From Nell to Jim,
 Upon their wedding-day,"
 Was traced in faint, yet loving lines—
 And there a rose leaf lay.

The date? Two hundred years ago.
 And who were Jim and Nell?
 Oh! moonbeam wandering through the church,
 Thou canst the story tell.

Their hearts beat high as low they knelt
 Together in this pew;
 And they crept closer as they bent,
 Belovèd book, o'er you!

They thought the Spring would last for aye—
 Ah! happy, youthful prime,
 That knew not grief's baptismal tears
 Reserved by cruel Time!

The leaf? He plucked a lovely rose
 Resplendent with the dew,
 As 'neath the everlasting stars
 He promised to be true!

Oh! bright the meadow-gladdening sun
 Shone in that fair June day;
 And merrily the throstle sang,
 Upon the hawthorn spray!

But then came Death, with chalice full
 Of wine that grief well knows,
 When oft thou wert with tears baptised,
 Dear leaf of treasured rose.

Now they are joined, poetic leaf,
 Beyond Death's dark regret;
 But thou dost keep in nestling love
 Their memory fragrant yet.

I. M. C.



